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Interview with Josephine Gaccetta by Greg Beam

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Gaccetta, Josephine

Interviewer

Beam, Greg

Date

August 25, 2000

Place

Portland, Maine

ID Number

MOH 229

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Biographical Note

Josephine Gaccetta was born in Rumford, Maine on August 26, 1931 to Dominic F. and Clorinda Gaccetta, both Italian immigrants. She worked as an assistant or as part of a campaign team in the offices of many Maine Democrats including Jim Oliver, Ken Curtis, and Edmund Muskie. She has an intimate knowledge of Rumford, both as the town she grew up in and how it has changed over the decades. She worked closely with many federal programs as they applied to Maine, such as HUD and other federal economic planning.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: Rumford, Maine community; family background; Lucia Cormier; Gabriel Heatter; Muskie Memorial; Jim Oliver; pictures; Main Stein Song; Ken Curtis; politics today; Jim Longley; Wal-Mart; Clean Air Act; Democrats in Rumford; Harold McQuade; George Mitchell; and the vacuum cleaner story.

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Transcript

Greg Beam: The date is August 25th, 2000, it's just after 1:00 PM. And this is Greg Beam, and I'm here interviewing Josephine Gaccetta. Did I pronounce that right?

Josephine Gaccetta: Yeah, you did indeed.

GB: All right, at her home on Plymouth Road in Portland.

JG: South Portland.

GB: South Portland, South Portland, thank you. To begin, could you please state your full name and spell it for the record?

JG: Josephine M. Gaccetta, J-O-S-E-P-H-I-N-E, M as in Mary, Gaccetta, G-A-C-C-E-T-T-A,

but they call me Jo.

GB: And there are two Cs in Gaccetta, did I have that right?

JG: Right, yeah.

GB: Two Cs, all right. And what were, where and when were you born?

JG: I was born in Rumford, Maine, August 26th, 1931.

GB: And you grew up in Rumford, right?

JG: Grew up in Rumford.

GB: And what were your parents' names?

JG: My parents' names were Dominic and Clorinda Gaccetta, and they both came from Italy. They came in the nineteen, early nineteen hundreds to work in the paper mill up in Rumford. That's how they got up there.

GB: Were there a lot of first generation immigrants in Rumford?

JG: Yes, yes. They had different communities. They had a little Italian community that they used to call Little Italy, and then they have a, there's a big French population, and they came from P.I. in Canada, and some Lithuanian people that came so, and there was a lot of Irish. So there was, there were two Catholic churches, one was the French church and one was the Irish church. And Ed Muskie went to the Irish church, as I did. It was called St. Athanasius, but since then St. Athanasius and the French, which was the Irish church, and St. John's, which was the French church, have combined. And so now it's one church, and it's St. John-St. A.

GB: So back then pretty much everyone who wasn't French went to the Irish church. Is that how it was?

JG: That's right, the Ital-, right, everyone else but the French went to the Irish church.

GB: So were, now, you said that there were kind of little communities. Was the city really divided along ethnic lines, or did you all interact?

JG: It was interacting, but we kind of, I know the Italians had a section that we lived in, but there were other Italians that were scattered in the, you know, in the rest of the town, as was the French the same way. They were pretty much scattered around, but they had their own little area, too, that they kind of migrated to. So it was, even though we had our little sections there was also people that were scattered, you know, throughout the town. So we weren't totally integrated in that regards.

GB: I see. Now, you said that your parents worked in the mills there?

JG: Yeah, my father was a janitor in the mill. And back in the forties they bought an Italian Restaurant called the Boston Market, so they had an Italian restaurant and an Italian grocery store. So he quit the mill. And he and my mother, and God, there was ten of us children, so we all worked in the store and the restaurant. And then, back in '49, my twin and I graduated. And so 1950 we came down to Portland, went to Westbrook Junior, and that's when they sold the store. They couldn't get good help, or they couldn't trust people or something, so, -

Mary Agnes "Aggie" Cornely: And don't forget what a beautiful gardener he was.

JG: Oh, my father, right, right. My father had a beautiful garden, both vegetable and flowers. In fact, the florist up there used to call him and use his flowers for sale, they were paying for his flowers. And he also had a tomato that he, I don't know, he put two or three together, I guess, and had this really great tomato that he also, people called the Gaccetta tomato up there. So, he was, yeah, he was quite a gardener, you're right, Aggie, thank you. Of course, if you go over to Italy you can see that they had, you know, all the gardens there are all, what do you call it, spaced up and down. What's that word I want, Aggie?

AC: What's this?

JG: Gardens that are -

AC: Oh, terraced.

JG: Terraced, right, thank you, terraced gardens. That's what he had. It was just a beautiful sight.

GB: Oh wow, it must have been something. So how big was Rumford when you were growing up, do you recall?

JG: Oh boy, I really can't tell you that. I don't think it was, it was probably, if I were guessing, I'd probably say fifteen thousand. Between fifteen, I don't think there was twenty thousand people in Rumford. And, of course, the big thing and big come on there was the mill, that's where everybody came to work. That was the big, you know, anyone lived in Rumford, you had to work in the mill, you know. So that was kind of, either that or get out, so, so we got out. And Ed Muskie did, too, I guess. He probably worked there summers going to school, I don't know. But everybody did that. They went away to school, and then they came home summers and worked in the mill. Get some more money to go back to school.

GB: Did you know him at all from Rumford, or I guess he was quite a bit older than you?

JG: No, he was a lot older. And he had left, too, pretty much when I was, he graduated about 1932, I think, or something around that time, so that he was. . . . And I graduated in '49, so I was way gone. But I did know a sister of his, he had a sister, I can't even think of her name now. But he had several sisters. And of course, you would know everybody going and coming to church, but there was one that I knew in particular, and I can't remember what her name was

now, it's been so many years ago.

GB: Could you tell me about her though, what do you remember of her?

JG: I can't remember that. I just remember she was a very pretty girl, and I think she liked to have a good time, she raised heck a lot. Outside of that I can't even remember, listen, I can't even remember her name, so that's not very good. But, I think her name was Betty, I think it was

AC: Did you mention Lucia, was it Lucia Cormier?

JG: Lucia, yeah, Lucia Cormier.

AC: I met her the year she was in charge of the census and became a census enumerator. And she was, I forget what her job was then.

JG: Probably headed it up for Maine.

AC: She was the

JG: She was a French teacher in Rumford High School for a lot of years, this Lucia Cormier was. And then she got interested in politics, and she ran for, she was in the legislature for a lot of years, state legislature. And then she ran against Margaret Chase Smith. Boy, I can't give you dates, it was back in the fifties I would think.

GB: Yeah, I think so.

JG: And of course, she lost that race. Then she got to be head of, you probably know all this anyway, she got to be head of the, what's the boundaries, what are the boun -?

GB: I actually don't know much about Lucia Cormier. I just knew that she had, she had run against Margaret Chase Smith.

JG: Yeah, what do you call it Aggie, when you're by the, when you have boundaries? She was head of the, oh, customs, the customs wharf, okay, sorry about that. She was head of customs for the state of Maine, so that was a big job, so she -

GB: Was that customs -?

JG: U.S. Customs, here in Portland.

GB: Oh, okay, okay.

JG: U.S. Customs House here in Portland, she headed that up for a number of years. And she went to Florida. She had a condo down there, right on the beach, at, we went to visit her one time in, not Delray but, oh, not too far from Delray.

GB: And so, did, how much, how old was she, and how did you know her originally? And was she around your age, or was she -?

JG: No, she was a lot -

GB: I thought she was older.

JG: Yeah, she's a lot, she was a lot older than I was, but she was such a prominent figure in town that everybody knew her, you see. And of course, when I got to be in the governor's office then, in fact, I think she was out of the State House then. She was, she probably was customs director at that time. But she knew me because I worked, I was pretty prominent in the governor's office, so she knew me from there. And of course, we'd see each other at all the functions. And, when she ran, I think we were running at the same time, I'm not sure, but, yeah.

GB: I see, all right. So let's back up. Let's talk a little bit more about Rumford. Besides you mentioned your parents' restaurant, and store, and the church, were your parents involved in the community in any other ways?

JG: Not really, they were, you know, they were poor immigrants. They were just trying to eke out an existence, and they had ten children, so, you know, everything was geared to the family. And it was, you know, "Let's go up and cut some bean poles up in the woods to, you know, to put in the garden," and that kind of stuff. So, they really didn't, they really didn't get involved in community activities.

They did, I can remember my mother did go into night school to learn English. All of the kids spoke broken, broken Italian you'd call it today I guess. I went over to Italy with three other gals, and my assignment was Italian, of course. And I flunked it beautifully because I was putting the words in all the wrong syllables, so I couldn't figure out where I was. So, I was not much help to them. But then we went into a place, and one of the gals had French, and she was speaking her beautiful French, and the waitress answered in English. So that wasn't, that wasn't much -

GB: I see, do you recall, did your parents have political beliefs that you knew of?

JG: Oh, my father was a strong Democrat, he always listened to Gabriel Heatter on the radio.

GB: Who was that, Gabriel Heatter?

JG: Gabriel Heatter was -

GB: I'm not familiar with him.

JG: Oh, he was a, who was Gabriel Heatter, Aggie?

AC: Who?

JG: Gabriel.

AC: Oh, he was a big -

JG: Big radio ann-

AC: Broadcaster, before television.

JG: Yeah, he was a big radio -

AC: He was like an anchor person, that is, now. But he was a political analyst, really.

GB: So would he give kind of editorials, his take on politics?

JG: Yeah, right. And also, of course, he was a, my father was a big FDR man, too, you know, with the, with all of the social things that he started. So, we were Democrats from, you know, from the get go.

GB: I see. And that rubbed off on you, did it?

JG: Oh absolutely, yeah. But I really didn't get involved, as I say, until I came to Portland and did some telephoning for Ed Muskie.

GB: Okay, so you, now, so let's go ahead and move on to that. You say you came to Portland in 1950?

JG: Yeah.

GB: Why did you come here, again, I think I missed that?

JG: I went to Westbrook Junior College.

GB: Oh, okay, okay.

JB: And I lived with my brother here in South Portland, and next-door was this fellow by the name of Wally Campbell, who was an attorney. And, of course, all these attorneys stuck together here, and they were a big, big clan of Democrats. And so they were all into getting Ed Muskie elected governor. And so he would give me a list of names, and we would call for Muskie, you know, getting them to the polls, and whatever you did in those days. So, that was my first encounter into really, you know, being active in the Democratic Party.

GB: I see. Did you meet Ed Muskie at that point, when you were campaigning for him?

JG: I don't think so. I probably, yeah, I think they had a party at Wally's house, and he was there. So, but I, you know, I was pretty much of a novice, and I didn't really, you know, I was

just excited about being there, so I didn't. . . . And being one of your lowly workers, you know, you don't really get too far with these attorneys, who always have to be in the limelight when the big cheese is around, so. But, I think I did meet him at that point.

GB: Tell me, what were your impressions of him when you first saw him in person, and when you first met him?

JG: Oh of course we were, oh, I was probably intrigued, you know, he was, and in awe. He was, you know, some, this big statue of a man that, you know, was going to be our governor. It was really exciting times. And then of course, when it came to fruition, it was really exciting.

GB: Did you really think that you had a chance of getting him elected when you were campaigning? What was the feeling within the campaign?

JG: Yeah, see, I wasn't really into that too much, because I was in sch-, you know, I was going to school. And so, I really didn't get into the politics of, at that time when he was running for governor. Except, you know, I followed it, and I knew we were all excited about what was happening. But I, as far as getting involved, I really didn't get that much involved with it, as I remember.

GB: I see, I see. And so, you were calling people on the phone, campaigning for Muskie?

JG: Right, yeah.

GB: Now tell me, what kind of reactions did you get, what would you be pitching to these people, and what would they say in return?

JG: I can't, I really can't re-, listen, this is fifty years ago. But I'm sure it was the same old pitch about, you know, "getting out the vote" and "your vote counts", kind of thing. And, "We've got someone that, you know, is exciting," and I'm sure that was the pitch. But I couldn't give you, I, I'm sure, it was something that was written down that everybody said, but I can't really give you what it was.

GB: Sure, sure, sure. Did people seem to respond favorably to the phone calls?

JG: I don't remember. I would have to say because he won, so I'd be inclined to say, sure, they were very excited.

GB: Something must have worked, right?

JG: Right, right.

GB: All right. So now, Westbrook Junior College: does that still exist?

JG: Yes, it does, it's now a four-year school. It's Westbrook College, and it's part of University of New England, down there where they had the, what is it they have at New

England, Aggie?

AC: Is that a med school?

JG: No, it's, it's, I don't know whether it's, it's not an M.D. school, but it's some kind of a medical school.

AC: I'm not certain what kind.

JG: Yeah, but they, and the two schools got together not too long ago, I'd say within the last five years. And Westbrook College, it's now Westbrook College. When I was there it was Westbrook Junior College, which is only a two year school, but it's since, it has since enlarged itself.

GB: I see. And what were you studying to do?

JG: I was just a medical secretary. I got out and worked for a orthopedic surgeon by the name of Dr. Asherman back in 1952. The schools pretty much placed you and, you know, gave you a lot of leads as to where to go. Back in those days it was easy, you know, to do that.

GB: And how long did you work for him?

JG: I worked for him from '52 to '56, I think it was. My brother had lost his wife, and he had two children, and they went back up to Rumford to live with my mother. So I figured that I ought to get up there and give her, she had raised ten of her own, so I thought it was time for her to have a, you know, some help. So I went up there and stayed with her. I stayed up there until, until I went to Washington. Yeah, that was '56 to '58, I was in Rumford, worked in the mill up there, in the office. And then, in '58, my brother remarried and took his girls back, so I . . . '58, I think, was the election of Jim Oliver, and Ed Muskie, and was it Clint Clauson? Clint Clauson was already down there I think. Gosh, this goes, Frank Coffin, are you familiar with these names, Frank Coffin?

GB: Yeah, yeah.

JG: Frank Coffin, there was, anyway, the three Democrats down there was Coffin, Oliver, and Muskie, and another gal from Rumford was Ed Muskie's office. Her name was Jean, it was Watson at the time and I think she married a Pialock, so she's still in Rumford, Jean Pialock. She was, she would be another one for you to contact probably, that worked right for, you know, right in his office.

GB: And do you know how to spell her last name?

JG: P-I-A-L-O-C-K. I think she works in the bank, I think she used to work in the bank up there. Whether or not she's retired now, I don't know. She was a very pretty girl and got to, I think she was the, what's that flower down there, cherry blossom princess for the state of Maine. So we got to go to a lot of things down there because of her.

GB: Oh, that's interesting. All right, so, okay, so when you came back to Rumford, this is while Ed Muskie is governor, this hometown boy. Were people in the town excited about that?

JG: Yes, I think they were. Of course, I wasn't very much in tune, you know. I knew what was going on but I really, as far as being politically adept as to what, you know, was going on, I don't think so. The townspeople are a little bit upset because they feel that he used, he always kind of, I guess, I don't really know how true this is, but he claims, you know, Waterville as his home town. But I'm sure that, you know, they've got a big plaque up there now, I don't know. You probably saw that in the papers recently, where they had a big plaque, and his wife and son were up there. I don't think I have the *Rumford Times*, but if you go back a couple weeks in the *Times*, *Rumford Times*, you'll see that they dedicated a big plaque up there for Muskie.

GB: It was just this past Saturday.

JG: Was it? Were you guys all up there?

GB: No, I didn't go up, but I talked to some people who did go up. And then I read about it, they had a big article on George Mitchell's speech in the Lewiston paper.

JG: Right, that's right, Mitchell was the speaker, that's right.

GB: And actually, Don Nicoll did a little write up on Muskie; that was in the paper for that as well.

JG: Where is Don Nicoll now? Is he, he has something to do with the hospital here in Portland, I believe.

GB: Well, he heads this project.

JG: Oh, he is heading this project, okay.

GB: Yes, yes, yes.

JG: Yeah, because that letter I got, right, was from Don. That's very good. Yeah, he was his AA back when he first started, so yeah, Don was a big gun way back.

GB: All right, so you went to Washington, D.C. in '58?

JG: Right, with Jim Oliver, he won a congressional seat. He wasn't all that popular because they called him a turncoat. He had been down there in 1937 as a Republican, and then he went down in 1958 as a Democrat, so he wasn't received all that well down there. Although he was, he did some great things, and I, you know, he treated his staff extremely well and, you know. I came home both summers. It was hot in Washington, D.C. so I was able to come home and work in the district office here in Portland, so that was kind of a treat for me. And whenever anything was going on down there we were the first ones that were invited, you know. He was, he was

very good to us. So I have, you know, nothing but high regard for him. And his wife was super, his wife was just as sweet as he was. So my, you know, my tenure down there, which was altogether too short. . . . But it has some very fond memories of, you know, what was going on.

GB: Now, what were you doing on his staff?

JG: I was his personal secretary, I guess you would call me, but I was in charge of appointments to the military academies. And people that came down from Maine, I would show them, take them around, put their cars in the garage and drive them around in my convertible, so that, give them a little better treatment than you would ordinarily get. And made sure they got all the right passes and that kind of stuff.

GB: Did you meet anyone particularly interesting doing that, did you drive anyone that sticks out in your mind?

JG: From Maine, no. There was some, there was a fellow in Rumford that I took around. What's his name? He's still around up there, and his family still remembers what. . . . I can't, I can't think of his, I see his face but I can't think of his name. He's just lost his wife, and he's still around in Rumford. And he has a daughter up there, and a couple daughters that live out of town, I think. Oh, I know what it is, it's Stan Masalsky was his name, Stan Masalsky.

GB: How's Masalsky spelled?

JG: M-A-S-A-L-S-K-Y. He was also Lithuanian, I believe.

GB: I see, all right, now -

JG: Probably knew Muskie well, better than I did probably, he's more his age.

GB: Oh, really, I'll remember that name. Tell me, who else did you work with on Jim Oliver's staff?

JG: Well, they're right here. This guy is dead now, Ron Wallace. Ken Curtis ran our district office here in Portland. That was me the day we closed the office in Portland. And over here we have, who's this?

GB: Oh, that was written by Roy Whitcomb.

JG: Did you know Roy Whitcomb?

GB: I didn't know him, but he's been interviewed for the project.

JG: Oh yeah. Here's Chip Stockford, he just died not very long ago, just within the last six months. He comes from South Portland, Maine, and he was down in Washington at the time. So those were when we were complete, all of the complete staff. I have lots of pictures of, but I can't seem to put my fingers on them, of, there was one with me and another worker from

Lewiston, and Ted, was it Ted Kennedy. I think it was Ted Kennedy. And then there's another picture of Bill Hathaway with, I think she was Faye Broderick from up north, she was national committeewoman.

And then there was another, there were two or three pictures, and I can't seem to put my fingers on them. And I took them to this party for Al Pease, he had a 75th birthday party and a 50th wedding anniversary all at the same time, so I took all these pic--, all our old political pictures and brought them up there. There was Mark Gartley who was secretary of state at the time, Linwood Ross was secretary of state at one time, I can't even remember all the pictures, a lot with. . . . Who do we have here, we have Polly Curtis, that's Mrs. Oliver. This was Ronnie Wallace's wife, and she was an intern at Curtis, her name was Curtis, no relation. She came down as an intern from the University of Maine, Sally Curtis. But isn't that funny, those are all that I could dredge up. I've got tons of pictures.

GB: Tell me, do you have, did anything particularly interesting happen when you were working for Jim Oliver, do you have any little stories that stand out in your mind from that time?

JG: I really can't think of anything offhand.

GB: Or do you recall, well, tell me, what was the environment working for Jim Oliver in Washington, D.C.?

JG: It was, it was a busy place. We had lots of, you know, we had lots of letters to answer and lots of constituent work that we did. He always came in with a, it was a pleasant place to work. He always was friendly and had a great sense of humor, so he found a lot of humor in stuff that we, you know, we really. . . . It was a pleasure being down there. But I can remember working a lot of weekends, too, for some reason or other. I don't remember what the, it must have been either some bill or something that needed a lot of attention, but I can't remember what they were, you know, from this day. But I remember working a few weekends. But by and large it was a fun time to be down there. It was during the [Jimmy] Hoffa days, too, so that I got to see the Kennedys firsthand. So it was exciting being there because here history was being made, and there you are, you know, right in the middle of it, so it's really an exciting place to be at. So we had some good times, lots of parties.

GB: What were those like, the parties?

JG: Oh, they were fun. Of course, they used to tease us Maine people because we never wore shoes, or something. They thought we, you know, had horse and buggy up here. I think it was just a joke, though. We used to go to, I'm trying to think of what that bar was right around the corner from the Capitol. And it was a Maine contingent, they always played the Maine Stein song whenever we went in there, which was like every night.

GB: What song is that?

JG: The Maine song, the Maine Stein song. You never heard of the Maine Stein song?

GB: I don't think I have, no.

JG: How's that go, Aggie.

AC: It goes, (*sings*), "da-da-da, drink to the rafters, (*unintelligible phrase*)."

JG: (*Sings*) "Drink to Maine, our alma mater, the college of our hats always." Oh, the Maine Stein song is very popular, it's -

AC: (*Continues to sing in background.*)

JG: That's like New York, you know, the New York song that they sing. Well, we have the Maine Stein song.

GB: Oh, wow, that's interesting.

JG: You never heard of the Maine Stein song, you're not from Maine, I can tell you that.

GB: I, no, I am from Maine, I am from Maine, I'm from Lewiston.

JG: You're too young.

GB: I must be too young, it must be a generational thing, yeah. Oh, that's interesting. All right, so, how long did you work for Jim Oliver?

JG: A short two years. We thought, we were joking, saying come November, whatever that date was, we'd be on the outside looking in, and that date came and we were on the outside looking in. And this is a party where right after the election she greeted all of us at her house with a crying towel, so that was kind of funny, that was her way of saying, "It's okay, folks."

GB: And who beat him in that election?

JG: It was a guy by the name of Peter Garland. Peter Garland beat him.

GB: Okay, okay, and where did you go from there, at that point?

JG: It was in 1960, I stayed down there and worked for, boy I can't, was it Senator [Claiborne de Borda] Pell? I think I was, I think I worked for Senator Pell for about six months, I think, there was, I can't remember now who it was, but I think it was Senator Pell. He was a silk stocking senator from -

AC: Connecticut?

JG: No, he was from Rhode Island, Newport. Is that the guy?

AC: I'm not sure.

JG: Okay, and it just was different, not, you know, not having a Maine constituency. So I, after six months I left and I came back to Maine.

GB: Now, I'm going to be showing my ignorance here again: What's a silk stocking senator?

JG: Well, they were born with a silver spoon.

GB: Oh, okay, I've never heard that term either.

JG: Aha, okay, well.

GB: All right, I see, I understand, so you came back to Maine and did what?

JG: I came back to Maine in 1961, let me see, I think I worked here in Portland. There was a place called Prosperity, I went to, I think I was the secretary to the chief honcho there. I went in and I told him, I said, you know, "If you don't hire me it's your loss." So I was pretty bra-, I can't imagine me doing that today, but I did it in those days, I guess. So anyway, and then Ken Curtis ran for sec-, did he run for governor? What did Ken Curtis run for? He ran for something and lost.

GB: Well, he was governor. Oh, when he lost, yeah.

JG: Yeah, he ran for something and lost, and then he got to be secretary of state so I went with him as secretary of state for two years. And we really ran for governor after that, from the secretary of state's office. So then I was in the governor's office for eight years, that was from, I don't know, when was it from? Sixty, '66 to '74 I guess.

GB: Okay, so that was quite a while. So what was, tell me about Ken Curtis, as a person and as a boss.

JG: He was great. I was his personal secretary. I was also in charge of having, I quit, oh yeah, I quit secretary of state's office and went and ran his campaign out of a hotel right around the corner from the office. And so I got to, I did all the thank you notes and all the stuff that you do in a campaign office. He would go out speaking and then he'd come back with all these notes for you to do, so there was a lot of thank you notes. And he was out all the time, you know, every night he seemed to be out somewhere. And then he won, and then we went into the governor's office. And having worked in the campaign, I knew who all the players were, so that I knew, and I was pretty much in with the appointments to commissions. And, of course, once you're in there people, you know, hound you for all these different positions that they want, and so. Severin Beliveau, who was a great, big dem-, a good Democrat, you're probably going to interview him at some point.

GB: Yeah, I'm pretty sure he's been interviewed before, yeah.

JG: Anyway, he tells, at a, we were at Vi Pease party about a year ago in York county, and he

tells a story that, he was talking about Vi at the time. And he told the story about when Ken Curtis was governor, that I had this list in my desk of people that did what they did. You know, whether they helped or didn't help, or who was on the team prior to, I think it was Wisconsin, because that's, you know, that was like the donemount, that was where you won. And so, he said, you know, we would pull out a name, and then Jo would say, "Uh-uh, he can't do that." You know, here's a guy that didn't, wasn't with us back in '62 or whatever it was, you know, so. So I had more of a clout, I guess, than I realized that I had.

AC: Ken Curtis told me that you were responsible for his being, getting to be governor.

JG: Well, he's probably being kind.

AC: No, he wasn't. You had people in every town in Maine (*unintelligible word*) on file. And of course, they were so rumped and (*unintelligible phrase*).

JG: I can you, I could tell you in every single town in the state of Maine of a person that I could call and say, "Ken Curtis is coming to town today. Can you get something set up for us?" And nine times out of ten, you know, he'd have a great reception.

AC: He wasn't kidding, he (*unintelligible word*) it.

GB: Oh, that's great.

AC: She'd (*unintelligible word*) stay in the office until midnight seeing that everybody got thanked and stuff like that.

JG: Yup, it was a fun time, it was a fun. . . . I've had a good reign, you know, I've enjoyed what I've done, and where I've been.

GB: So was it much different working for a governor than for a -

JG: A congressman.

GB: For a congressman?

JG: Well, I don't know, because you're working for the federal government, and then you've got the state. I think the state is a little more localized, you know, you don't, you're more in tune and in touch with people. I would have these mothers come in to me, you know, in the secretary of state's, when I was in secretary of state's office. And they'd come in because we had charge of Motor Vehicles. And they'd come in and say, "Oh, my son is a great guy," you know. He'd get picked up for OUI or for, you know, speeding or, not usually speeding, it was usually for drinking. And she'd say, "Oh, my son," you know, "they're really taking advantage of him. What can you do?" And I'd look up his record and it's probably three miles long, so there was really nothing you could do, you know. We never, one thing Ken Curtis never did was fixed any tickets or did anything, you know, out of the way like that. He was really a square shooter. So he never would, never would do anything that would, you know, be out of line.

So we had a fun time, you know. Alan Pease was the AA, and he had a great sense of humor, and it was just, it was just fun to go to work in those days. And we weren't as, I think today you really are, you're really more, what's the word I want? What's the word I want, Aggie?

AC: What?

JG: In today's world you're really more -

AC: Well, you're very restricted.

JG: Well, not only restricted but you -

AC: Scrutinized?

JG: Not scrutinized, but today you're really, I can't think of the word I want. But anyway, you're more -

AC: Under the gun?

JG: No, not under the gun, well, in a way you're under the gun. But it's not important anyways, I was just going to make a point.

GB: Is it about the way that politics is run or just kind of -?

JG: Yeah, the way politics is run. They were, you were more, you had to, you weren't as, you weren't as, I can't think of the darn word I want.

GB: You're thinking that today you have to be more careful about what you say, looking out for, strategizing and so forth?

JG: Right, right. In those days you were much more carefree, I think, and you didn't have to worry as much about how you said it or what you said. In today's world, you know, you get picked up for just about anything you do or say.

GB: And so you think things ran better under the old way?

JG: Yeah, I think so, right, yup.

GB: I see, so -

AC: There wasn't as much bickering.

GB: Wasn't as much bickering?

AC: I don't think so. Putting other people down.

GB: Huh. Okay, so -

AC: Civilized, (*unintelligible phrase*), civilized. I think it's horrible today.

GB: So you worked for Ken Curtis until, did you say '74?

JG: Nineteen seventy-four, I think, he got out, right.

GB: And where did you go from there?

JG: Then -

AC: (*Unintelligible phrase*).

JG: Jim Longley got to be president. He was the, got to be governor, he was the first independent governor, I guess, in the country. And so I stayed on with Jim Longley, and he asked me where I wanted to go. He says, "You can go wherever you want to go in state government." And I said, "Well, I just, I'll go to state planning office." They were planning a Maine, it was some program that was going on to, I can't even think of the name of it now, Maine, having to do with resources in Maine, you know, and preserving Maine's future, I guess, or something. Some title like that, something Maine's Future. Anyway, I went over there, and I stayed at state planning until they had another reorganization, and they called it the. . . . I went over to the Department of Economic Development and, Department of something Economic Development, and I stayed there until I retired. Got my twenty-five years in ten years ago, and got out, 1990. So, I had twenty-five years and said, "Bye-bye," and never regr-, just walked out and had a great time ever since. I said all I wanted to do in my retirement was play golf, and play tennis, and play bridge, and play poker, and that's pretty much what I've been doing since I've been out. But it's been a good run.

GB: So in those departments that you were working for, the -

JG: Department of Economic and Community Development, that's what it was.

GB: Okay, yeah, and before that was state planning, did you say?

JG: State planning, right.

GB: We'll start with state planning: what kind of issues did you tackle in state planning?

JG: I think I headed up, I was doing the A-95 review they used to ca-, I don't even think they have that today, I don't know. But there was a gal at Bates that had it either before me or after me, and she's the dean. I can't think of her name now. I see her name in the papers every now and then. She's dean of, I don't know, dean of something at Bates. Anyway, A-95 was a program that was set up by the federal government. And you had to scrutinize projects that came into the state, and you had to send out a monthly or weekly bulletin to this list, and they would

comment on it. Like, if the federal government wanted to build a new post office, that had to go through A-95 and get cleared, and that kind of stuff. I think that's what I did there. And then, when I went over to economic development, community development, they had a federal program that HUD, Housing and Urban Development, gave tons of money to the states to revitalize the towns and communities. You know, either for facades on your streets, or sewer lines, or, you know, whatever. So, we would get these things in from the towns reque-, you know, requesting, they'd submit a proposal, and then there was a group of people at the planning office, at the economic development office, that would go over all of the plans. And they had criterion that they would, and then they would award these, you know, these grants to towns. And they gave out, you know, millions of dollars this way. And I was, I pretty much was in the financial end of that. I kept the financial records of that, I pretty much -

GB: Oh, hold on a second.

*End of Side A
Side B*

GB: All right, so let me ask you, did you have any further contact with Ed Muskie after you had campaigned for him?

JG: Outside of going to, you know, different functions that, there in Washington, I don't really think I had very much. Of course, we knew what everybody was doing, but outside of, you know, his staff, I guess I never had much contact with Ed himself.

GB: I see. Did the congressmen and senators' staffs from Maine have a lot of contact with each other? Did they kind of work together a lot in Washington?

JG: Pretty much, right, yup, they did.

GB: I see, I see. And so, what kind of encounters would you have with them? Would you have to go over to their office and deliver messages back and forth, that sort of thing?

JG: I think they had a, either a weekly or a monthly meeting, the congressional, the Maine congressional delegation it was called. I think they would probably meet, I don't know whether it was weekly or monthly, and go over, you know, Maine business. What they would do, the strategies they would have. But I got the feeling that they weren't all that in tune with Jim Oliver. He really had to work for everything. These other two guys, Muskie and Coffin, would get news releases, like, for nothing. And any time that Jim Oliver got a news release he really had to work hard to get it, because, you know, he was kind of the pariah of the day, in being, you know, a, what do they call them, a turncoat, I guess, at the time. So, but -

GB: Was he even viewed that way in Maine? Because I was just thinking, how did he get elected? Was he a credible Democrat in, was he seen as a credible Democrat (*unintelligible word*) in Maine?

JG: Yeah, I think so, af-, yes, I think he was. Of course, I may be biased in that, I don't know.

You'd have to ask somebody that wasn't that close to him. But, and he worked so hard for Maine. I can't even remember some of the stuff that he worked to do, but he was, oh boy, I don't know. You know who might be a good one on Muskie, might be Allen Pease, where he was a professor at Maine. I don't know if anyone, I don't know if Don Nicoll knew him or not.

GB: His name has come up, both Peases' names have come up in his life.

JG: She was very, she was the Democratic chairperson, state of Maine, back when Ken Curtis was running. I remember going to, God, about every night you'd go to some affair, you know, some Democratic function that was going on. You could go out every night, I think.

GB: Oh really, what kind of functions were those?

JG: Usually when they were running for whatever office they were running for.

GB: I see, I see. And they would have, hold, were they social functions?

JG: Yeah, they were, you'd call them a social function. They were more or less trying to get the people excited, I guess, about whatever the election was that particular time. You'd get there first with your buttons and put, especially if you had competition, put buttons on people, you know, before the next guy got there.

GB: So have you been involved in any other campaigns?

JG: Not really. Joe Brennan, we did a little bit. We had a party down at, Mary Bartlett was a schoolteacher here, she just died this past February. But she had a party for Joe Brennan. And I don't think we had one for Tom Allen. But we were going to have one this year and she passed away, so we didn't do it. But outside of Joe Brennan, I don't think so. I think we worked for Joe Brennan, and we did a little bit for Tom Allen a couple of years ago.

GB: I see, okay, now, I wanted to touch upon Lucia Cormier again. How well did you know her?

JG: I knew her when she was running. When she ran for congress we used to meet up with each other, because we were running. I don't know whether that was Jim Oliver's, was that '58?

GB: I'm not sure.

JG: It could have been '58, I don't know. Because I used to see her, boy, some of these places are far reaching. They're in no man's land, and we'd always meet somewhere. So, she was a pretty smart cookie as I remember, but she was a lot older than I, so I really didn't, you know, I didn't socialize or anything with her. But, I remember her as, you know, as one of the titular heads of the Democratic Party in Maine. But, and I'd see her, you know, I'd see her at all these functions, and she knew who I was, of course, and, of course, I knew who she was. But outside of that, I don't think, I can just remember seeing her at different functions. And people that she would have with her. I don't, I don't know, I think I went to a, I think she took me to a tea once

at the Blaine House. God, that's so many moons ago I can't even remember who, what it was for. But, yeah, she was a force in those days.

GB: What was she like personally? What was her personality?

JG: She was smart, she was very smart. She was bright. I remember when she was running, she, she was going to stop because she had, she was, someone had, she was offered some money, and the money didn't come through. So, she was going to stop campaigning because, you know, you need money to run. And so, I don't remember, the money must have come in, because she continued. But she was, I think she had, you know, she was, I don't know, I really can't speak too too much about it, because I wasn't really that close to her, you know. I just kind of knew her from afar.

GB: Now, do you recall when she passed away? Because we've been trying to locate her obituary, and we're not sure exactly where to look.

JG: Oh boy, no, but there's Cormiers up in Rumford that could probably. . . . She still has relatives, I think, in Rumford. So, I think if you looked up the Cormier family in Rumford, or, who would know up there? That would be a good project for either the state rep. up there or whoever the senator is, to get that information for you. I think they could eke that out somewhere.

GB: I see, now, the Rumford community: have you been back up to Rumford a lot since you lived there?

JG: Not too much, no. I really, once my parents passed on it's. . . . I still have a house up there, but I don't get up there very often.

GB: Has the community changed a lot?

JG: Oh, I think so. I think it's gone downhill a lot, I think -

GB: Oh really, how so?

JG: Well, the main street is like, you probably don't know Berlin, New Hampshire, but when Berlin, the Brown Company went out in Berlin, New Hampshire it was a ghost town. And I don't know as you'd call Rumford a ghost town yet, but, you know, there's a lot of buildings that are unoccupied. And the town, you know, downtown is disgraceful, I think. It looks, you know, it looks pretty cruddy.

AC: (*Unintelligible phrase*).

JG: Oh, is it Wal-Mart, or some, there's a big, big Wal-Mart or something coming into Mexico that's going to be hiring a lot of people, so that may do something to spruce it up a little bit. It may help a little bit, I don't know. And you know Lewiston, God, Lewiston's store fronts are as bad as Rumford, I think.

GB: Well, I was going to say, those Wal-Mart type places can be wolves in sheep's clothing sometimes.

JG: That's true.

GB: They can sometimes do more harm than good by pulling money away from the local economy, the "ma and pa" operations.

JG: Exactly, that's true.

GB: I'll move on because I'm not here to give my opinions, so. Something just came to mind that I wanted to ask you. You were growing up, I guess, early, very early in your upbringing, in the Depression. Was that felt in Rumford? Did you see that, was that visible to you?

JG: No, we were poor, but we really didn't know it because we had plenty of food. You know, they had big gardens in those days so that we always ate very well, you know, the Italians always had the pasta and, you know, the big Sunday dinners, and. . . . So, as far as the economy, you know, it didn't, I didn't even know it was going on, you know. So I would have to say it was negative.

GB: Sure. Did it take a toll on the mill that you know of?

JG: I can't answer that, I don't know.

GB: Now, what was the environment like in Rumford? Because I know there was a lot of pollution coming from the mill; were you aware of that when you were growing up?

JG: Oh yes, indeed, my, the car. . . . We lived, I guess you would say, heading south, so that the wind blew down toward our house and there was always a white soot on the car from the sulphur in the mills.

GB: Oh, really?

JG: Oh, sure. And that was a big thing of Ed Muskie's, of course, is the water and air bills that he passed when he was in the congress.

GB: Do you think that's gotten better in Rumford since then?

JG: Oh, yes, that plus the water, too, right, oh yes indeed.

AC: Doesn't have that sulphur smell.

JG: Right, doesn't have the sulphur smell. And eventually, the, I think the soot left. Of course, I don't know what's happened today, because I haven't been there for three years or so. But at least it was, they were cleaning it up when I was there, so that was a good thing. Mr.

Clean, you know, was what he was known as.

GB: Do you think that's, as far as you've seen, that's his major legacy?

JG: I think so, I think that was a big part of it, right. I didn't hear George Mitchell's speech so I don't know, you guys probably have a copy of it I'm sure. Let me think, I can't even think back then, but that was, I think that was a big part of it. I don't know whether he had anything to do with, with reorganization of federal government or not. I don't know what, whether he had anything to do with that. I can't really remember back then. I'm at the senior stage now where you, you know, you call it "senior moments" when you forget. So whatever happened happened, and I can't really recall.

GB: Well, he did work with intergovernmental relations and government operations.

JG: Yeah, I guess that was, yes, that was probably what. And of course, he, I think he was probably on the fisheries thing, too, at the time. All the Maine people, I think, eventually started on that or something. They think they're, I don't know, I don't know why, but.

GB: Now, working for all these Maine politicians, did you hear them talk about Ed Muskie? Was Ed Muskie kind of really there, did they notice him a lot, or did you get a sense of their opinions of his work as a senator?

JG: Oh sure, I think he was the titular head of the party for a long time, you know. Whenever they had Democratic functions he was always, you know, number one, always there.

GB: I see, all right. One more thing about Rumford: you mentioned that your father was a staunch Democrat. Were there a lot of Democrats in Rumford back then, do you know?

JG: Oh sure, sure, sure.

GB: There were, okay.

JG: There was always a Rumford, Rumford was always a mill town and a Democratic town.

GB: So it was one of those early Democratic strongholds.

JG: Yup, yup, like Biddeford is, and your county, and Lewiston, as in Lewiston in the Androscoggin County.

GB: I see. I guess one more thing, do you, can you think of anyone in Rumford who you knew who would have known the Muskie's fairly well in the community? You gave me the name Jean Pialock.

JG: Jean Pialock, yeah, she worked for him. She's younger than I am, so she, I mean, she would have that perspective of just working for him in Washington. I'm trying to think of who, God, they're probably half, probably all dead. Once you get talking about, of course you know

when you get to be seventy and eighty, those are the times when it's twilight years. I don't know whether Stan Masalsky would, I don't know whether he would, he was around his era I think. He's the only name that I can think of. But that would be a name to contact, I think, Stan Masalsky. And I don't know, oh, Harold McQuade.

GB: Oh yeah, I've heard that name, J. Harold McQuade.

JG: Right, yup, J. Harold, that's right. In fact, I think he was the one that was the instigator of the -

GB: The memorial. Yeah, that was his project.

JG: So I'm sure Harold, and he has a big mo-, he went to B.U. with my brother, so I know he has a big mouth, I know Harold very well. And he has a daughter down here that owns Inn By the Sea. So he's, Harold's, he's a good guy.

GB: Could you tell me about him, what did he do in the Rumford community?

JG: Harold McQuade ran a, he ran an insurance business and a travel agency up there. He was, you know, he was one of the prominent people in the town, good looking guy and had a big mouth and was, you know, everybody knew him. And I think he went off to jail for income tax evasion at one time.

GB: Oh really?

JG: Yeah, but he, you know, I don't think that was very long. And I don't think that was any stigma to him, I don't know. You know, I don't, I don't think it bothered Harold too much. I don't really know that, but we all, he was a likeable guy, you know, we all liked him. And where he, you know, knew my brother it was, you know, I knew him a little bit better probably than some people.

But I went up to Rumford, asked him for a job in his insurance and real estate. I guess I was a real estate broker at the time, I had a real estate license, and what he wanted to pay me was dog wages. And I said, "I don't think so, Harold." You know, so, so I don't think I, that was my encounter with him in the work thing. But also, and I'm sure he's still around there so, because he just, you know, I haven't been up there, but I'm sure he's still, I don't know whether he goes to Florida for winter, a lot of that crew does.

GB: Now, he must have known Muskie, I'd imagine, fairly well to have headed up all these memorial projects for him.

JG: Sure, oh sure. George Mitchell would know most of the people that he would know. He would be a good contact. I don't know how George Mitchell and Don Nicoll, I don't know what their thing is there, whether there was any, I always felt that Don was jealous when George Mitchell came into Muskie's office. I don't know that for sure. I just, I kind of sensed that because I don't think it was long after that, and I could be wrong with this, but I think it wasn't

too long after that that Don Nicoll left the office and George kind of took over as the top man there. But I could have, you know, that could be false information I'm giving you, I don't know that. But I always felt that there was, you know, there was a feeling there between the two of them. And they could be the best of friends for all I know, I don't know that, you know, it's just something that stuck in my craw for -

GB: Did you know George Mitchell when he was working for Muskie?

JG: Oh sure, sure. George Mitchell used to write Ken Curtis' speeches just about, or at least edit them when he was running for governor. George was, yeah, very close friend.

GB: Could you tell me about him?

JG: Tell you about George Mitchell?

GB: Yeah.

JG: Bright, he was a bright guy. I don't know, what else do you want to know about George? Do you want some dirt about George, you want the good stuff?

GB: Anything you (*unintelligible phrase*) I put on the record, you know.

JG: No, George is a good guy. He's done the state of Maine proud, you know. He's Muskie's, what do you call them, underneath?

GB: Successor, or?

JG: Yeah, whatever, and George is always there for, you know, he did his homework and paid his dues, you know, and he's a good guy. He's another one that's done Maine proud, you know, he's just been a, been an active Democrat, and he's done a lot of good for the state.

GB: All right. Now, the Democratic Party, you've been involved in the Democratic Party for several decades, so, have you seen any philosophical or organizational changes in the party in that time?

JG: It's really hard to say because I've been out of the party for a long time now. I haven't really been active. I haven't, it's hard to say, I just, you know, what I read in the paper is about all there is, so it's hard for me to envision what's going on today, in today's world. I just, I kind of got out of it and said, "Okay, let the, you know, go out to pasture and let the young kids handle it now, you know, you had your turn." So, I kind of just sit in the background and watch what's going on.

GB: How about for the time that you were involved, over that time period, did you see any major changes?

JG: Hmmm. What do you think, Aggie?

AC: I think the basic principles have, certainly in that time, remained very much the same, you know, helping the less well off, and social programs, stuff like that.

JG: Can you hear her?

GB: Yeah, oh yeah, I can hear. I see.

JG: So I guess things probably hadn't changed that much. The only thing that changes is the people in the, you know, that are running the organizations. But outside of that, I think, I think the philosophy and everything remains pretty much the same as it has throughout the ages.

GB: I see, well -

JG: That's why I'm a Democrat, you know.

GB: All right, well, I'm done with my questions, so do you have any final remarks you'd like to make, anything you'd like to add or emphasize?

JG: What do you think, Aggie, what can we say? Say about the Democratic Party or Muskie or anybody, anything?

AC: You said it all.

JG: Said it all? We haven't said very much. Aggie tells the story, when we lived in Augusta that -

AC: I told him about that.

JG: Oh, did you tell him?

GB: Want to say it again, though, we can put it on the tape?

AC: Oh, about the cat?

GB: Sure, sure, if you'd like to put it on the tape. I thought that was a funny story.

AC: Let me see if I can get my thoughts together. Muskie came to the house to wait for an affair that was taking place very close to it.

JG: And to have a drink. I'm sure there were drinks involved, always drinks involved. We don't talk about that.

AC: Anyway, he chose a chair that my white cat liked as her very own. So, when he stood up to go, to leave the apartment, he was covered with white hairs. And so I rushed over and said, "Wait just a minute." And I went into the closet and got the vacuum cleaner out and as he was

getting ready to go I was vacuuming his back and his legs and whatnot.

GB: That was a good story. Now, what's your name, ma'am, so that I can get it on here?

AC: Aggie Cornely, C-O-R-N-E-L-Y.

GB: N-E-L-Y, all right.

AC: Nobody knows me, though.

GB: Well, that's a good story, so thank you. And you're now on here and part of the Ed Muskie history. All right, so I think that's, you think that's a good way to end it?

JG: Good, sure.

GB: All right, well, thank you very much.

End of Interview