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Gacetta, Dominic oral history interview

Nicholas Christie

Interview with Dominic Gacetta by Nicholas Christie

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee
Gacetta, Dominic

Interviewer
Christie, Nicholas

Date
June 27, 2001

Place
Lewiston, Maine

ID Number
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Biographical Note

Dominic Gacetta was born November 2, 1928 in Rumford, Maine to Dominic and Clorinda Gaccetta. He attended Stephen's High School, Maine Central Institute (MCI), Bates College (class of 1953) and served in the U.S. Marine Corps. He taught junior high in Readfield, Maine and worked in Sales for General Mills and Scott Paper Company. He has been involved in non-profit poverty programs.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: Bates College; Cultural Heritage course; Rumford, Maine community; Stephen Muskie and his tailor shop; environmental protection; Republican Party in Maine; Democratic Party in Maine; immigrants to Maine; ethnic divisions in Maine towns; Lewiston economics; Jim Moody; John Donovan; and NPOs and poverty programs.

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Transcript

Nick Christie: This is an interview with Dominic Gacetta on June 27th, 2001 at the Muskie Archives. The interviewer is Nick Christie. Mr. Gacetta, would you please state and spell your full name?

Dominic Gacetta: Dominic Gacetta, D-O-M-I-N-I-C, G-A-C-E-T-T-A.

NC: And where and when were you born?

DG: In Rumford, Maine on November 2nd, 1928.

NC: How long did you live in Rumford?

DG: Through graduation from high school in '46.

NC: And from there you went . . . ?

DG: I was in the Marine Corps for two years, and went to MCI [Maine Central Institute] for

one year, and was a student at Bates and graduated in '53.

NC: Now, going back to Rumford, what were your parents' names?

DG: My father's name was Dominic; my mother's name was Clorinda, C-L-O-R-I-N-D-A. Both came from Italy.

NC: First generation?

DG: Yes.

NC: And where did they work?

DG: My father worked in the mill, and my mother worked at home, and eventually they bought a combination store and restaurant in Rumford.

NC: When you say the mill, which mill are you -?

DG: There was only one mill in Rumford.

NC: Oxford Paper?

DG: Oxford Paper, yeah.

NC: Did you ever end up working in that mill?

DG: I sure did. Worked there in high school, during the war years. They needed help and quite a few of us getting out of high school about two-thirty would go to the mill to work the three to eleven, three to eleven shift.

NC: And you worked there pretty much all through high school, or?

DG: I think it was after I turned fifteen, which would have been my, maybe my junior year.

NC: What did you do at the mill?

DG: A good part of the time I worked on the woodpile. We would, they had the four foot length logs that had to be thrown on a conveyer belt or thrown into the pool to be processed through the chippers, and then eventually come out as paper.

NC: So it was heavy manual labor?

DG: Yeah, it was.

NC: Now what was high school, you went to what, Stephen's High School?

DG: Stephen's High, yeah.

NC: What was that like?

DG: Well, actually there were two schools I went to. The neighborhood school was MacDonald School, I went there from kindergarten through seventh grade, and the high school, it included eighth grade right through the senior high.

NC: So that was a Catholic, that's public -

DG: That was the public high school.

NC: That's public high school. Now, you went, in '46 you said you went to the Marine Corps.

DG: Yes.

NC: What made you, what -?

DG: I was seventeen and I knew eventually I would have to serve, so I enlisted for two years.
NC: And where did you go with them?

DG: Not too far.

NC: No?

DG: I wanted to go further. I went to, basic training was Parris Island, South Carolina, and then from there to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

NC: And that's where you spent out the rest of your service?

DG: Yes.

NC: Now how did you end up at Bates?

DG: When I got out of MCI, a friend of mine had attended there. Are you familiar with MCI?

NC: No.

DG: Maine Central Institute in Pittsfield, Maine. It's, it was originally set up along the lines of being a prep school for Bates. And when I was at MCI the dean of students and his wife, the dean of the faculty and his wife were both Bates grads and the dean of students was a Bates grad. And Milt Lindholm was the director of admissions who part-time coached and taught at MCI, and they were in constant communication with the admissions office here. And there were several of us that left MCI to attend Bates. And also, Dean Harry Rowe was chairman of the trustees at Bates while I was there.

NC: He was also a dean at MCI?

DG: He was chairman of the trustees. He was the dean of the faculty here at Bates.

NC: Did you come here with a specific major in mind?

DG: No, I didn't.

NC: And what did you end up majoring in?

DG: I majored in economics.

NC: Economics. Do any particular professors stand out in your memory of your education at Bates?

DG: Yeah, some of them particularly, John Willis was one of the top teachers, and another one was Ray Kendall, psychology. Dr. Willis, by the way, taught Cultural Heritage. You're not familiar with that.

NC: No.

DG: That's what made, separated Bates from the other colleges, I think. That was one of the top programs of any college in the country. It was taken by all juniors and seniors for four semesters, and there were three profs that taught cultural heritage. Now, the other professor was John Donovan, who was a government professor. I think he later worked in Washington with the, in one of the federal offices down there.

NC: Can you tell me a little bit about what John Donovan was like personally?

DG: John was a teacher and he was a person. He, in fact he was the first one that, I was taking government in his class and he was the first one that pointed out that one of the strongest Democrats in the state of Maine was a lawyer in Waterville named Muskie. And soon after that Muskie came on the scene as one of the top Democrats.

NC: So that must have been in '52 or '53 he was saying that.

DG: Fifty-one or two, yeah.

NC: But what was the cultural heritage program about?

DG: Cultural heritage started from the beginning of time with all the arts and sciences, and it moved right up through to the present day. I was surprise that they discontinued that here, because that to me was one of the great courses that was offered. And it wasn't, it was, it had to be taken by all students regardless of their major.

NC: You said it dealt with the arts quite a bit?

DG: With arts and sciences.

NC: Now, you graduated in '53. Where did you go then?

DG: For a couple of years I taught school, and then I got into sales.

NC: Where?

DG: I taught in Readfield, a little town outside of Augusta. And while I was there, (I taught seventh and eighth grades, and it was maybe ten or fifteen minutes from Augusta) and while I was there I took a group of seventh and eighth graders to the State House in Augusta to sit in on one of their sessions. And while we were there there was a strong Democratic lady named Lucia Cormier. Lucia was an English teacher at Stephen's when I was there, and she retired the year that I graduated and she got into politics. And she heard the announcement that I was there with a class of students, and she approached me and asked if the kids would enjoy meeting the, Governor Muskie at the time, so she arranged to have our class go through his office and he shook hands with all the students, and I'm sure that was the highlight of their day.

NC: Wow. Lucia Cormier?

DG: Cormier, C-O-R-M-I-E-R.

NC: Did you maintain contact with her ever again?

DG: No, I never had her as a teacher, but I knew her, coming from a small town you know all the teachers in the school.

NC: Right. What was your initial reaction on meeting Muskie?

DG: Actually, I, in Rumford I got to know his father, who was one of the top tailors, had a good tailor business on the island in Rumford. Well respected and a dignified man in the community. Everyone loved his father.

NC: Who was also first generation.

DG: I think he was, I think so.

NC: From Poland. Your parents, you said, moved, both of them moved here from Italy.

DG: Yes, they did.

NC: Do you know why they moved to Rumford?

DG: I think the paper mill was a big attraction; they were looking for means of employment and between the paper mill and the railroad I think most of the people that came from Europe,

that's where they ended up working.

NC: Did your dad work at the woodpile as well, or?

DG: No, but he worked, he had other jobs inside the mill, I'm not sure what he did. The woodpile served two purposes: we wanted to get conditioned for football, and we needed the extra money to, we could get by working there.

NC: You mean, conditioned by the heavy work you were doing.

DG: My senior year we won, we were state champs in football my senior year. And everyone either worked on the woodpile or had some jobs where they were working, either cutting wood or working in that department somewhere.

NC: I bet everyone got strong quick.

DG: That's right, yeah.

NC: Now, the area that you grew up in, was that Little Italy in Rumford, or?

DG: Yes, they were all Italians. And all of them were, came over from Italy. They all owned their own home, there were never any discipline problems; discipline was always handled within the home. Never was concerned about seeing any police cars around and sheriff's cars because it was very peaceful and well disciplined.

NC: Was Italian spoken?

DG: Yes, and one family in particular, they, the kids were never allowed to speak English in the home. Which in a way was good, because that fellow today speaks very fluent Italian.

NC: I bet.

DG: And I wish I did.

NC: Do you speak any. or?

DG: I understand. I speak very little; I understand a good part of it.

NC: Now, Rumford's sort of split up along ethnic lines.

DG: Yup.

NC: With Virginia, and Stickytown and so on. Can you explain how that all breaks down for me?

DG: Well, I grew up in what's called Smith Crossing. It's on the way into Rumford from here,

and there's one area where every family up there were Italians. Stickytown, well we had many different nationalities, and most people went to the Catholic Church, St. Athanasius. There was also a French church there at the time, there were two churches which have now been combined into one, was, St. Athanasius was for the Irish and the Italians and the Polish, and then the St. John's is a French church, it still exists.

NC: Now St. John's and St. Athanasius, it's the same.

DG: It's just one, yeah. They come, actually they just, one's around the corner from the other.

NC: Would you say that it was predominantly a French town, Rumford, or?

DG: Probably a little more leaning towards the French than the others, but there were a lot of Irish, there were a lot of Polish, there were a lot of Italians and a lot of the French came down from Canada.

NC: How was the relations would you say between, say, the Irish and the Italians?

DG: Never seemed to be any conflict that I knew of. Everyone seemed to meld into a good relationship with all of them.

NC: Including the French?

DG: Yeah.

NC: Would you say that your, was your family politically active, or?

DG: No, they weren't.

NC: But they were, were they Democrats, or?

DG: Back then I don't think the political parties mattered to much to any of them. They all worked, they earned their own way, and they weren't looking for any handouts. And everyone owned their own home. And, so we lived more or less comfortably. Not, no problem, you know, not with the amount of wealth and all, but comfortably and they weren't looking for the government for anything.

NC: So you don't remember Rumford as having a heavy political atmosphere really at all, when you were growing up?

DG: Not that I recall.

NC: Now, by the time you made it to Bates, did you have a political, any sort of political leaning?

DG: Not really, I wasn't too strong into any party.

NC: Did you feel like at Bates there was a political, any political tension or movement?

DG: No, I didn't, I didn't feel any while I was here.

NC: Now, after you, you said you taught for a couple years in Readfield?

DG: Readfield.

NC: Just outside of Augusta.

DG: Yeah, it's maybe thirty, forty minutes from here.

NC: And you were teaching the students probably all different subjects?

DG: Yeah.

NC: Okay, now you taught there for a few years and then where did you go?

DG: Then I accepted a job in sales with General Mills.

NC: Was that a management position, or?

DG: No, I was selling the grocery products, I covered parts of Maine and parts of New Hampshire.

NC: And your, like where was your home base, where did you -?

DG: We worked out of Lewiston and Auburn. And eventually I was transferred to Barre, Vermont.

NC: That central Vermont, or?

DG: Barre's in the central part of the state, yeah.

NC: How long were you in Lewiston for?

DG: I think it was '56 that I started with them, and I left in '63.

NC: So you were in Lewiston for seven years.

DG: Sixty-three or four, then I went to Vermont for four years.

NC: What part, did you, was your home in Lewiston, or in Auburn?

DG: Lived in Auburn, then we built a home in Lewiston.

NC: You built a home in Lewiston.
DG: Yes.

NC: Around Bates, or -?

DG: Maybe a mile from here is, behind Pettengill School there were two dead end streets, and they put in a new street to connect them, and I had the first home there. Called Richmond Avenue; I don't know if you're familiar with it.

NC: I know the area though. What was, what do you remember of Lewiston while you were living here?

DG: I remember the downtown being vibrant, I remember the, it seemed to have much more life than it has. And all the stores were filled, and people congregated in town, they did all their shopping. But with the malls over in Auburn, everything's changed.

NC: I'm trying to remember my history, Lewiston in the late fifties, early sixties, in terms of the mills, there were still a few, some of them were still -

DG: Most of them were still here. The Bates Mill was strong, a lot of your shoe factories were still here.

NC: So you feel it was more, more the malls in Auburn than the closing of the mills that's really put Lewiston (*unintelligible word*).

DG: Well, a combination.

NC: A combination.

DG: I would like to see Lewiston adopt some of the policies that they had in Burlington, Vermont. Are you familiar [with] up there? Burlington's the largest city in Vermont, and on the main street, I think it's called Church Street, they blocked off the last one or two blocks in the city and they put in an underground mall and they, they stopped all traffic for those last two, one or two blocks. And to supply the stores, all the traffic had to go around to the back of the stores, but the cobblestone streets up there attract a lot of people. They have, during the summer they have the sidewalk restaurants and the sidewalk displays of clothing and things. And, it's something that Lewiston could very much use.

NC: It's almost hard to know where to start in Lewiston.

DG: Well, it is hard to know. But I've told many people, I think there's one thing that could happen that would revitalize downtown Lewiston: if L.L. Bean were to put in a store on the main floor where Peck's is, they're using the top floors from other business, but if they put in a retail store I think you'd see all the stores up and down Lisbon Street get filled in a hurry. L.L. Bean has a way of attracting customers from everywhere.

NC: Yup. So you lived here for seven years doing sales with General Mills. Before I move on to when you went to Vermont, politically, in Lewiston, did you get a feeling for what the general feelings of the citizens were here?

DG: John Donovan ran for Congress, I believe, and I was disappointed to see him lose, because knowing him as I did, I thought he would have been a great man to represent us down there.

NC: He would have been a strong Democrat.

DG: Yes, yeah. Other than that, I really didn't get too involved with the other candidates.

NC: Now, then you want to Barre, Vermont.

DG: Yeah.

NC: And you continued to do sales work there.

DG: Yes, I did.

NC: And how long did you live there?

DG: I was there four years, and then I left and went down the coast. I ran the poverty programs for Knox County, out of Rockland, Maine. We had the Head Start Program, Neighborhood Youth Corps, we had the Home Health Program, and I started a surplus foods program on a countywide basis, and -

NC: This is all non-profit work.

DG: Right. This is, these are the poverty programs set up by the government, for the government down there.

NC: And what years are we talking about?

DG: I believe that was '67 and '68.

NC: Of those four you just mentioned, you were most closely related to the surplus, or?

DG: I ran, I had a manager for each of the programs, and I ran the over all department.

NC: You directed the managers, okay. Can you tell me about Head Start?

DG: Yeah, well it was fairly new at that, we had, most of our teachers were regular classroom teachers in public schools, and I think they were pretty well organized. And at the time, I don't know if you're familiar with it, but we had to go to the different schools and get them to allow us

to use the classrooms, and that would be counted towards the amount of money they were getting from the federal government. It was a pretty good program, well run, and eventually, there was no program in Lincoln County, I was in Knox County, that's Rockland, plus I had, Lincoln was the next county up where Boothbay Harbor is, and I was asked to see if they could use a Head Start there. So we had people who surveyed the area and we did come up with two classrooms of students for Head Start in Boothbay Harbor as well.

NC: What was the main objective of the Head Start program?

DG: The main objective then was to take preschoolers who came from the lower income groups, and provide them with learning the basics and getting along with people. Not so much learning their ABCs or that, but getting along with people and teaching them how to work, and I think more or less trying to get them on a regular schedule so that when they did get into the public schools they'd have an idea of what to expect.

NC: More of a social program than an educational program.

DG: Yeah.

NC: Now, what about the Neighborhood Youth?

DG: That was a good program. There was a fellow, had a good man running that department and he, they provided jobs for some of the low income kids. And we also used them eventually, when I started the Surplus Foods program, they were a good, it helped us, the Surplus Foods program was on a countywide basis, and what that amounted to is we'd get these supplies through the federal government and then we'd redistribute them to the thirteen, I think there were thirteen towns in the area. And we had a, we had one place where, in each town, where the people would go and pick up their surplus foods. And then we tied in the University of Maine Extension Service, they would show some of the people how to use some of the surplus foods that were provided for them.

NC: And this wasn't connected to food stamps.

DG: Food stamps, no, we had nothing to do with food stamps. But to set this program up I had to get, I went to each of the town or city managers and got their signed approval so that were given authority to distribute food in the towns. And usually there was a centrally located church that was looking for, to help out the program. Worked out well.

NC: You'd use the church as the distributing point?

DG: Yeah, the distribution center. When that program was going well, I got a call one winter, a winter I was there, from the island about an hour off Rockland, Vinalhaven. The superintendent of schools called and he wondered if we could bring the program over there. During the winter, he said, a lot of the fishermen aren't working and their kids aren't eating as well as they should, and he thought that would be good, so we managed to get free passes through the Maine Ferry Association and went up and set up a program in Vinalhaven, which

worked out well.

NC: It was needed there.

DG: Yes, it was.

NC: Generally speaking, you found that the Food Surplus program was successful?

DG: Yeah. Everyone had to be certified to collect, you know, to collect the surplus foods; it was for the low income families. I should tell you, while I was there [I had] my first experience with George Mitchell. He called me one day, he was, I'd gone around to the drug stores and, the low income people, in the winter time, it's tough on them. They, some of them are fishermen and they had no income, so I arranged with several of the drug stores in the area to provide drugs at a discounted price. And George Mitchell called from Waterville. This was before he got into . . . . And he said, "I'm calling from Waterville," and LaVerdiere's, who owned a chain of drug stores, I don't know if you're familiar with them, they owned a chain of drug stores, very successful in Waterville and they were close to the, Senator Muskie. Well they talked to him about it, and they felt that they would be losing business because of some of these . . . . So George Mitchell asked what I was doing. And I told him, I said, "Several of the drug stores have offered to give a ten percent discount for any low income families." And I said, "LaVerdiere's certainly entitled to do the same." And that was the end that I heard from them.

NC: Yeah, I would think almost equally as important as food is drugs.

DG: That's right, yeah.

NC: Pretty expensive, especially now. I don't know how, I know you get disability in Maine now within two years, you start good health care benefits, but other than that it's just pretty hard. So you worked with these programs for -?

DG: I was only there a year and a half.

NC: A year and a half. How did you jump into this, all this non-profit work?

DG: Well, this was new, they were just setting up these countywide community action program directors, and I thought it would be interesting so I gave it a try. But after a year and a half I was convinced that I should be back in sales; it wasn't my preference. And I was getting calls from Vermont so eventually I went back, and soon after that I was called by Scott Paper and I worked for them in Vermont until I retired.

NC: What was your specific job at Scott Paper Company?

DG: I traveled the state of Vermont, New Hampshire, and for a while, parts of upstate New York in sales. I sold the grocery wholesalers and covered some of the stores up there, the biggest stores.

NC: So Scott Paper Company, it's the distribution company? Or it's a -?

DG: They were a paper manufacturer at the time, they were probably the biggest towel manufacturer in the country.

NC: Where were their factories?

DG: It's headquarters are in Philadelphia. The factories, they had one in the Hudson, Fort Edward, New York, the main factory that supplied most of the east coast was in Chester, Pennsylvania just south of Philly, had one in Mobile, Alabama, they had one in Evans, Washington, and smaller ones throughout the country.

NC: And you started working for them in what year again?

DG: Probably about 1970, '71.

NC: Nineteen seventy-one. So, around '70, just around that exact time, Senator Muskie and some of, and much of the national legislature were making new rules about how companies, such as paper mills, could run their business.

DG: That's right.

NC: Did you see that effect take place in any way?

DG: Yeah, yes I did. At the time they, I didn't think they spelled out the requirements as clearly as they should have, and I think some of the, naturally all the paper companies had their representatives down in Washington trying to find out how do we comply with what they're looking for. And they did the best they could, I think, to comply with the regulations.

NC: So you felt that the paper companies wanted to clean up?

DG: Sure they did, yeah. One thing I don't think many people realize, at the time when I was with Scott; they used to plant more trees every year than they cut down.

NC: Really? So environmentally conscious.

DG: That's right.

NC: Do you feel that might have been unique to Scott Paper Company, or generally speaking?

DG: I have a feeling they all did that.

NC: Do you have any idea of how that cleaning process worked out in Rumford?

DG: No, I don't, I . . . . Like I said, I left Rumford at seventeen, and I'd go back to visit the family but really never lived there after that. But I'm sure that it has cleaned up quite a bit. I

don't know if you're familiar with the, there was a video made, it was a doctor that passed away two weeks ago up there, Dr. Eddie Martin, did you happen to see that in the paper?

NC: I don't think so.

DG: Dr. Martin, he was a year ahead of me in high school, he went to (*unintelligible word*) and I went to Stephen's, and he went to Colby, then he went to University of Vermont, and he was concerned about the amount of cancer in the area. And I wasn't living there, so I don't know all the details, but I did see a video that was made, and I think it was called something like "Cancer Valley" and it showed some of the cancer patients as they were being treated during the bad parts of their lives, and I think he was, Dr. Martin was, felt that a lot of the patients he treated, that this could have been part of the problem.

NC: (*Unintelligible phrase*) a lot of it was connected in Rumford to the mill, or?

DG: I don't know, I'm just quoting what he said. He passed away two weeks ago; very popular man up there.

NC: Awful to think that.

DG: I remember seeing the video. I'm sure someone up there would have a copy of it.

NC: Probably a good chance Don Nicoll may have heard of it as well, he's -

DG: Probably, yeah.

NC: Now we touched on this briefly, but going back to the Scott Paper Company, specifically with pulp and paper waste, now the company as a whole, you said generally people felt that it was a good direction to go in in cleaning that up. But did you get a feeling for just, say, your colleagues in general, their attitude towards the mill being employment versus environment?

DG: Actually, I was on the road, I was in Vermont and I wasn't connected with any of the mills or the, you know, the mill employees. I'd see them at meetings on occasion, but I was alone and I covered two or three states, and we'd have maybe meetings several times a year down in Philly, but other than that I never got the feel for what goes on inside the mill.

NC: You were on the road so much?

DG: Yeah.

NC: Do you feel that your, when you were at Bates, your economics major played a big part in . . . ?

DG: Yes, I do.

NC: What would be the direct connection?

DG: Well, we had some good profs at the time. I forget all the names, but I had no idea what goes on in the business world until I started taking some of those courses. I also took, did a minor in education, which I thought we had a great education department then as well.

NC: Socially, what was Bates like while you were here?

DG: When I was here we only had seven hundred and fifty students. We had to attend chapel three days a week. Today you couldn't get the student involvement in that. But I thought, and everyone seemed to be very compatible, everyone got along well and I could see no problems with anything going on here at that time. You know, they were quite a bit more restricted than they are today, but I think that was true throughout the country.

NC: Right. And you said Dean Lindholm -?

DG: Milt Lindholm?

NC: Yeah, Lindholm, he worked, he was here, or he was -?

DG: He was the one that accepted us, he was director of admissions for years.

NC: Do you remember him personally?

DG: Yes, I do.

NC: Can you tell me a little bit more about him, or?

DG: Well, the best way to tell you is last month issue of the MCI alumni magazine, there was a big, did you happen to see it? There was a big write-up, two-page article on him. I don't have it, someone borrowed it, but when I get it back I'll bring it in; very interesting, and a very professional person. Well loved by the whole student body. I think he turns ninety this summer.

NC: I've heard a lot of positive things about him, but -

DG: You don't know Mr. Lindholm?

NC: Not personally.

DG: You should get to know him because he's, he also was a trustee at MCI for about thirty-, I think he said thirty-eight years, something like that. If you want, when I get that article back I'll bring it in.

NC: That would be great.

DG: Give you a good idea of a little of his background and why he was so well liked.

NC: Now you have a sister, Jo?

DG: Jo, yes.

NC: She's gotten, she took a political bent in her life, right?

DG: Yes, she's always been a strong Democrat.

NC: Can you tell me a little bit more about her?

DG: She, Jo was in Washington when Senator Muskie was down there. She was with the congressman, Jim Oliver, at the time. And she roomed with, Jo was Jim Oliver's secretary and she roomed with Muskie's secretary, I forget now who she was but I think she was a girl from Rumford as well; a very strong and dedicated Democrat. She, I'm sure she may have told you, she worked for Ken Curtis when he was secretary of state, and when he was governor for eight years, she was his secretary.

NC: Now, she got involved politically originally by just making phone calls. I read the interview we had with her, and it said that she sort of just happened to get involved with it all. But, do you remember seeing her progression of getting more deeply and deeply involved in it, or?

DG: No, actually she was living in Rumford and I wasn't living at home at the time, so. I know she worked hard in Augusta, and she was very popular and she loved the work. And when it came election time, I think she did a good job as far as getting the word out of the people she was interested in seeing get into office.

NC: What are your impressions of Muskie as a politician?

DG: I really never had many dealings with him. One time when they were setting up that Surplus Foods program on the coast, he was at a gathering down in Camden, Maine and we got to talking, he and I, and I was concerned then about the future of the poverty programs, because this was something that was on an annual basis, and he explained the workings of government, how you take care of some of your senator friends and they'll take care of you. You vote with them and in turn they'll vote with you on things that you need. And, I didn't feel that there was a direction I wanted to go to; I wanted to get into something a little more secure than things like that. But he, we had a Stephen's High super reunion back, maybe five or six years ago, seven years ago, and he was invited to that. I was hoping he'd return. It was a reunion of all graduates from Stephen's. They closed Stephen’s; the last graduation was in '69.

NC: Okay.

DG: And starting in 1970 there was no more Stephen's High, it was Rumford High and then Mountain Valley. But he was invited to the super reunion and we had, I believe it was, nine hundred and sixty-two [962] people back for that from about thirty-two states, three Canadian provinces, and two foreign countries. But he didn't show up for that, and we were a little

disappointed that he didn't. I'm sure that being as busy as he was that he had other things to do. And a lot of people were hoping that he would show up, but, you know, he was so popular that they wanted to see their favorite senator. Actually, I saw much more of his father than I did him. His father was always on the island. You're familiar with Rumford?

NC: A little bit.

DG: The downtown is the island part, and that's where he had his tailor shop, and just the greatest gentleman. Well liked by everyone.

NC: I'm going to flip this tape over really quckly.

End of Side A
Side B

NC: Okay, we're resuming the interview with Dominic Gacetta. We were talking about Muskie's father and you were explaining that you had more contact with him.

DG: He, his business was set up on the island in Rumford, and quite often you'd see him walking down Congress Street going to work or coming up on a break. And he, his personality was one of the greatest; everyone loved him.

NC: He was a very colorful guy?

DG: Yeah. Well, he wasn't flamboyant or anything like that, just a neat individual to talk to; good character.

NC: Was he physically as imposing as Senator Muskie?

DG: I don't think he was as tall as his son.

NC: Right. Now, you are involved with an alumni group from Bates. Is it the Jim Moody group?

DG: Yeah, Jim was, Jim and I were classmates.

NC: Can you tell me about that?

DG: Well, Jim and I go back, he was an economics major as well, and we took most of our courses together. I can talk further about Jim; he's one of the greatest guys.

NC: Go right ahead.

DG: When I was in Vermont, I was with General Mills, no, I was with Scott Paper, and Jim had stores in Vermont, Hannaford Brothers had stores. And quite often Jim would come up to check the stores, and he and I would get together and go to a hockey game or a baseball game in

Montreal. And one time this friend of mine who owned, he had season tickets to the Montreal hockey games, and he said, "Any time you want to use them let me know." So I approached him one time and I asked if we could use the tickets, and he wanted to know who was going up with me. When I mentioned Jim Moody's name, he got all excited, he said, "I've been, always wanted to meet Jim. Do you mind if I go with you?" And this guy was an important person in Jim's life because Hannaford Brothers owned the Shop 'n Save franchise in Maine, New Hampshire, New York, and Massachusetts. And this friend of mine owned a Shop 'n Save franchise in Vermont. So Jim wanted to meet him as well. So from then on about any time Jim came to town to go to Montreal, this fellow, George McQuade was his name, he, I think he had his own six Shop 'n Save stores in Vermont, but he would go to Montreal with us, and eventually they got to be pretty good friends. But Jim is a person that no matter where you go, no matter who you see, no one has ever had a bad word to say about him. Today he appears to be no different than he was as a freshman here at Bates.

NC: Really.

DG: After all his successes.

NC: Business successes, or?

DG: Well, I talked to him yesterday in fact, for about a half hour, and he still has companies approaching him to be on their board. And I said, "Jim, you're retired." I call him to play golf, and he's got a board meeting to go to, or, but he loves that kind of work. And actually I asked him years ago if he wasn't interested in getting into politics because we could use some good business minds in state government as well as federal, but Jim's not at all interested in that.

NC: He likes the private side. Now, are you involved with any alumnus organizations with Bates?

DG: Not really.

NC: Not really.

DG: Quite often we have a group of MCI grads who get together.

NC: Okay, so you feel more closely related to the people you met there than -?

DG: Actually, most of our, most of the students that were here when I was here were from out of state. There was only a handful from this area, from the state of Maine.

NC: Okay. Were most of the other students from out of state like Massachusetts and New York, or all over?

DG: All over. Mass., New York, New Jersey, Connecticut.

NC: Yup, sort of the same as it is now.

DG: Yeah.

NC: So do you, have you been kept up on, been keeping up on what's been going on at the school for the last, since you -?

DG: Yeah, yeah.

NC: What are your impressions of the changes that have taken place?

DG: Well, I was disappointed a few years ago when I got back from Florida to see all the bad news that was on TV and the newspapers, and what was going on on campus here. When we were here, everyone was well disciplined and enjoyed it. Actually, when Norm Ross was here it was tough to even walk across a lawn without someone getting after you.

NC: Really?

DG: I was surprised when they put beer in the Den. When we were here, I believe a bottle of beer in a room would cost you your, you'd have to leave, pack your bags and go home.

NC: Really? Be expelled?

DG: That's right.

NC: That's really not the case here today. Now, when you said the troubles at Bates, you mean there were the, there was this -?

DG: At the time they were having problems with rapes on campus. I think the blue lights and telephones throughout the, on every building throughout the area are all good, a good idea. That should keep things pretty well under control.

NC: It's hard with the alcohol policy to control certain things.

DG: Yeah, yeah.

NC: It's a complicated situation.

DG: And I don't know when they discontinued that Cultural Heritage program, but a lot of the students have no idea what that's all about and to me that, it may have been something that Dr. Phillips brought in when he came in as the president.

NC: Brought in the Cultural Heritage program?

DG: Yeah, I'm not sure but I think maybe he was the one that brought that along.

NC: You liked, you thought he was a very talented -?

DG: Yeah, very. He was, to me he was one of the greatest.

NC: Did you ever get an impression of what President Reynolds was like here?

DG: Never knew him.

NC: Never knew him. And now there's President Harward.

DG: Yeah.

NC: Did you know Larry Harp from Rumford? He would have been a much earlier class than you; he would have been Muskie's class at Stephen's High.

DG: No, I never knew him.

NC: Or Harold McQuade?

DG: I knew Harold McQuade well, yeah.

NC: Did you?

DG: Yeah. Knew Harold when he had an office over here at the Chase Hall.

NC: Oh, did he?

DG: Downstairs, you know, when you go downstairs, that first office on the left on the way to the Den?

NC: Yup.

DG: He had an office, what was it called, where they set up travel, a travel agency.

NC: It was in Chase Hall at Bates?

DG: Yes.

NC: I didn't know that, okay.

DG: I think he had one at Bates, and he may have had one at Colby as well. Do you know where I mean, do you know the office I'm talking about?

NC: Yup, that's I think where housing is now.

DG: Could be, yeah. Until, I think he had that until maybe three or four years ago. I think Harold's the one who organized the Muskie program in Rumford where they set up the

memorial.

NC: Yeah, he's the one that put it together with George Mitchell, and Christopher Beam who works here as the archivist. He [Harold] must have known Muskie pretty well.

DG: Yes. He may have been two or three years behind him in school, but I'm sure that he did know him.

NC: So have you pretty much kept your same political leanings throughout your entire life?

DG: I'm more or less an independent, I vote for the person.

NC: Was it always that way?

DG: For quite a while, yeah. I'm not convinced that the two party system is the way it should be going. The way they're voting strictly party lines down there, it's bothersome to see what goes on. I don't know if you ever watch Channel 51?

NC: Is that C-Span?

DG: C-Span is 27, I think, this, 51 usually has the senators at the senate hearings. It quite often is kind of interesting but you see too much party politics and things like that.

NC: It's frustrating to listen to.

DG: At times it is.

NC: And, what's your impression of the Democratic Party, both on the state level or on the national level now? Do you -?

DG: I feel that right now the Democratic Party is not the party that it was years ago. Today I think they're leaning too much towards the, they're allowing too many people to get by with not going to work. Their welfare programs I think, although they've corrected some of it, it was too bad to see people who would say I'm doing better by not going to work than I am to go out and get a low paying job. For their own self respect they would have been better off to go out and get a better paying job and try to improve their future. But my feelings now is that they try to take from the rich and give to the poor, and I feel that if people have worked hard all their lives they shouldn't be expected to support those that don't want to work.

NC: Taxes aren't going to solve everything.

DG: That's right.

NC: What about the Republican Party, do you feel that they are a good counterpoint to the Democratic?

DG: Well, they have their faults as well. They all do. The independents, there's an independent congressman in Vermont named Bernie Sanders, I don't know if you ever heard of him. When I was in Vermont, Burlington, the largest city, was strictly Democratic. Bernie came out of Brooklyn, I think, New York, and he would sit on the steps at the University of Vermont and talk with the student body. And eventually he surprised the whole city of Burlington, he ran for the mayor and he won, despite the strong and deep Democratic ties there. And from there he ran for Congress, and he's been an independent congressman for, I don't know, probably four, six years out of the state of Vermont. And I see him quite often on TV, he's well spoken and he's strictly an independent, and I don't think he favors one side over the other. But he's there to represent the general population in Vermont and he does a good job or it.

NC: More issue related than -.

DG: That's right, yeah.

NC: And then of course you have the Jeffords situation now from Vermont, which is changing everything quickly.

DG: Well, I think he kind of upset the apple cart in Vermont. I think a lot of people voted for him because he was a Republican then and, but I understand that he's returned some of the donations that were given to him by some independent, you know, by some Republican voters up there.

NC: So now you live, where do you live? You live in Portland?

DG: No, I live down here about a mile from the school, Champlain Avenue.

NC: You live right here in Lewiston.

DG: That's right.

NC: Oh.

DG: Champlain is just beyond Pettengill School, you know where that is on College Street here?

NC: Yup, that's right next to Spare Time Recreation?

DG: Before you get there.

NC: Before you get there, okay. You're pretty close. So you're, I, so you have an intimate knowledge of what's going on in Lewiston right now with the downtown. When you were mentioning that earlier, you -

DG: Well, I, the city's taken over the Bates Mill and I don't think there's anyone there that's knowledgeable enough to take over a business like that and try to run it as a business. I don't

know enough about it, but I think the sooner they get out of that business the better off we'll all be.

NC: You mean go back and let it privatize?

DG: That's right.

NC: It's probably not going to happen anytime too soon, but. Yeah, unemployment in Lewiston right now is pretty bad.

And then what are your impressions of the Maine politicians that are in the Senate and Congress right now, John Baldacci and Olympia Snowe, do you -?

DG: I think they stick pretty close to their party lines. Except for Olympia and Collins, I think they vote a lot with the Democrats. I called Olympia's office a couple of times and I got a response a couple weeks ago, which wasn't, didn't satisfy me. I asked her why they allowed Mobil and Exxon to merge. When you let number one and two companies in the oil business merge, you know that you're going to expect higher prices because your biggest competitor's eliminated. She never answered that question. I asked what she's doing about the energy crunch, that we have no subway system, we have no trolleys, and we need the car to get around in and whatever the price of gas is, we have to pay it. That was a week after the announcement came out that Mobil and Exxon profits were the highest of any company ever in the history of this country. And she didn't respond to that. All she did say was she, I think she was putting in a bill to eliminate the federal gas tax during the summer months. That's like a Band-Aid to our problem.

NC: Right.

DG: But now I read, I think it was yesterday, where she and Collins both voted against drilling off the east coast for more oil. I don't care where it comes from, we need oil, and it's about time that we start opening up some places of our own.

NC: So would you say that right now the environmental situation in America is going in the right direction, or the wrong direction?

DG: Until something's done with our energy problem, I don't see where it's going anywhere. Although in the last week they've dropped gas prices ten or twelve cents in some areas.

NC: Yeah, it's much better now than it was a year ago, or a half a year ago. So I guess I'd want to ask if you have any more, anything else you'd like to talk about?

DG: I think we've covered about all of it.

NC: Okay, well this was great. The Archives greatly appreciates it.

DG: Thank you.

NC: Thank you.

End of Interview