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Interview with Robert E. “Bob” Hirshon by Andrea L’Hommedieu

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Hirshon, Robert E. “Bob”

Interviewer

L’Hommedieu, Andrea

Date

September 18, 2002

Place

Portland, Maine

ID Number

MOH 363

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Biographical Note

Robert E. “Bob” Hirshon was born April 2, 1948 in Portland, Maine and raised there. His parents were Severin and Gladys (Wein) Hirshon. His father was a dentist. His mother worked in the home and was from the Waterville area. Bob was involved with the evaluation system for the Model Cities program in Portland during his high school years. He received his undergraduate and law degrees from the University of Michigan. He joined the law firm of Drummond, Woodsum and MacMahon in 1973. Hirshon was President of the ABA (American Bar Association) in 2001 and 2002. In 2003 he was appointed National Counsel to AFFECT (Americans for Fair Electronic Commerce Transactions).

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: Portland, Maine community; 1968 campaign; American Bar Association; Maine Bar Association; Maine Commission on Legal Needs; Pine Tree Legal Assistance; traveling with Muskie; Model Cities; Muskie anecdotes; loan forgiveness program; environment; and the Manchester, New Hampshire incident.

Indexed Names

Bourgeois, Henry
Chandler, Bruce
Chandler, Nancy
Coffin, Frank Morey
Hirshon, Gladys Wein
Hirshon, Robert E. "Bob"
Hirshon, Severin
Humphrey, Hubert H. (Hubert Horatio), 1911-1978
Johnson, Lyndon B. (Lyndon Baines), 1908-1973
Mitchell, George J. (George John), 1933-
Muskie, Edmund S., 1914-1996
Muskie, Jane Gray
Nash, Ralph
Nixon, Richard M. (Richard Milhous), 1913-1994
Ornstein, Norman
Scowcroft, Brent
Squire, Russell M.
Tower, John G.

Transcript

Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview with Mr. Robert E. Hirshon on September 9th – I mean September 18th, the year 2002, at his office at Drummond, Woodsum & MacMahon at 245 Commercial Street in Portland, Maine, and this is Andrea L'Hommedieu. Could you first start by giving me your full name and spelling it?

Robert Hirshon: Sure, Robert Edward Hirshon, H-I-R-S-H-O-N.

AL: And where and when were you born?

RH: I was born in Portland, Maine on April 2nd, 1948.

AL: And what community did you grow up in in Maine?

RH: I grew up in Portland.

AL: What was the community like then, in the fifties?

RH: It was a fairly depressed area. There were I think maybe just two or three restaurants that I could even remember. And that it didn't seem like it was a city that was engaged in much of anything, quite frankly. It was, certainly in the late fifties, I think my earliest recollections are of references to people who would talk about getting a college degree out of state and moving out of state, of definitely not coming back to Maine.

AL: And what was it like ethnically in Portland when you were growing up? Was there diversity?

RH: I think there was an ethnic and religious diversity, in the sense that there was a strong Catholic community reflected in the Jesuit schools. I think there was a strong Jewish community, and obviously a very large Protestant community. As far as other religions, I'm not sure that there would have been any other religions in, you know, that really are of any appreciable numbers in Portland. Possibly even in the state of Maine.

As far as ethnicity, the, you had waves of, really of groups, of immigrants coming into the city of Portland, usually ending up in the Eastern Prom area, which is Munjoy Hill. And you had the Jews, Jewish wave, who came in, that's where my grandfather, one of my grandfathers, lived, on Munjoy Hill. That's where my dad and uncles grew up. You had an Irish wave, you had an Italian wave, but it was mostly Eastern European and Western Europeans who were coming and immigrating, coming to America, immigrating to America. And then if they wound up in Portland, they would usually wind up I think in the Eastern Prom area.

AL: Now your family, what were your parents' names and their occupations?

RH: My father's name was Selvin, S-E-L-V-I-N. My mother's name was Gladys. And my father was a dentist, and my mother was a housewife.

AL: Was your mother from Maine also?

RH: Yes, my mother was from Waterville, Maine.

AL: And did you have relatives there that you visited while you were growing up?

RH: Very frequently. I had, my grandparents lived in Waterville, Maine, and I had some great uncles, cousins, that lived in Waterville, Maine.

AL: And did you get to know the Waterville community when you were young?

RH: Yes, I did. I remember fishing in the Mesalonskee, you know, and visiting with my grandfather. You know, playing pool in the pool hall on I think it was Main Street, and you know, just visiting throughout the area.

AL: What was your mother's maiden name?

RH: Wein, W-E-I-N.

AL: And did you get a sense of the Waterville community as well, from visiting?

RH: Yes.

AL: What was it like and how does it, how did it compare to Portland?

RH: Well, it was a small community obviously, but it was a, you know, it was a community that, when I say I got the sense of the community, it was really a, you know, an impression of a very young boy. I would visit my grandparents quite frequently, either with my parents, we would drive up to Waterville, or I would, at the end of the school year, when I was old enough, I would end up taking a train, when we had train service between Portland and Waterville. And I remember, and basically, you know, the community that I saw was just a community that, I remember the paper mills across the river in Winslow, I remember just going down from the house, because they lived very closely to downtown and the store that they had, and just meeting people, and you know, it was a very friendly community.

AL: What schools did you attend in Portland?

RH: I attended public schools, graduated from Portland High School.

AL: And where did you go to college?

RH: I went to University of Michigan, both undergraduate and law school.

AL: And law school. And then you came back to Maine?

RH: And then I came back to Portland.

AL: So you're one who came back.

RH: I'm one of those who came back. You know, clearly there was a difference in Maine during the early seventies, late sixties, I think Maine was becoming more vibrant. I think the senator had a lot to do with that as far as Model Cities. And in fact I worked in Model Cities as a, when I was between I think my junior and senior years in high school, and my senior and first year, both summers. I worked one summer in Portland, and one summer in Lewiston.

AL: Oh, really?

RH: Yup.

AL: What aspect of the Model Cities Program were you involved in?

RH: I was involved in evaluation system. Portland was selected as one of I think three or four pilot cities within the Model City Program and, to create an evaluation system which would then be replicated throughout the country. And I was fortunate enough to be assigned to that project, and worked and helped design, along with the consultants who were retained, and one of the members of the staff, to actually create out of whole cloth a new evaluation system that would measure the success of Model Cities. And that turned out to be a very successful pilot project, and indeed the evaluation system that was created was replicated throughout the country.

And when Lewiston was putting together its evaluation system, it needed someone who

happened to know something about it, so I was just fortunate enough to get a job. And I ended up teaching the director, and helping the director actually, learn about the evaluation system that I had had a hand in creating as a college student. So it was a wonderful opportunity.

AL: Was that Henry Bourgeois or somebody else?

RH: Henry Bourgeois was the director of Model Cities at that time, at the beginning, although he was soon replaced. The, somebody, I can't remember the gentleman who was the director of evaluation. But Henry I think was the original director, I think he was involved in my hiring if I remember correctly. The person who, in Portland who was involved, went on to work for Mayor Luger, and I think it was Hawkins?

AL: So what, from doing these evaluations and that process, what did you find was successful about Model Cities?

RH: Well, what we did is we evaluated the various programs. So Model Cities was a vehicle in which it funded programs that were run by different organizations. And what we would do is we would sit down with the organization and figure out a way to evaluate the program to find out whether or not it would be successful. I was involved only in setting up the program. Since I was there just for summer, I couldn't tell you which programs received good marks and which programs didn't receive good marks. But it was a, it was the development of a system that would then allow future funding to be funneled into those organizations that were successful, and take a look at those organizations that weren't successful. And I assume that those organizations that weren't successful, as those programs that weren't successful, ultimately were no longer funded.

AL: Do you have a sense of what, how Portland has changed over the years because of Model Cities?

RH: I think that that was the first step to Portland, to sort of take advantage of not only the beauty of Portland and you know, its harbor, but also to create a more vibrant city in the sense of the people who worked here could see a city that was now engaged in creating opportunities, engaged in creating a strong social system for its citizens. And it therefore made it a more attractive city in which to live.

AL: Now this was during your senior year in high school and in the summers.

RH: Actually it was, yeah, during my, I think, Portland, I worked in Portland between my junior and senior year in high school, and I worked in Lewiston between my senior year, I'm sorry, I said high school. I meant college, my junior and senior year in college, and my senior and first year of law school. Not high school. If I said high school, I misspoke.

AL: Okay, and you came back to Maine, and what did you begin, did you start in a law firm right away?

RH: I started in this law firm, Drummond, Woodsum & MacMahon, and I have been here ever since.

AL: Wow, so you've been quite connected to, has Drummond, Woodsum been at this spot for all these years?

RH: No, this is the third office building in which I've been in. We first were at 465 Congress Street, we then went to the Maine Savings Plaza, and then we purchased our own building down on Commercial Street and we've been here since that time.

AL: And what kind of law do you practice?

RH: I started off primarily as a litigator, and but I am now moved into issues involving regulatory legislative matters, legislative advocacy, regulatory representation. I still do a little litigation, and am developing a practice in social policy type of issues.

AL: I know you've been quite involved and are the former president of the Maine Bar Association -

RH: Correct.

AL: - and are currently the president of the American Bar Association.

RH: I just retired, just finished my year as president, and I am now the immediate past president.

AL: And what was that like?

RH: Which one, the presidency of the American Bar Association, that was pretty incredible. It was an opportunity to travel the world, and indeed we logged more than two hundred thousand miles in that one year. Visited just about every state within a period of I'd say a year and a half, visited I'd say about fifteen, sixteen foreign countries, met with foreign leaders of those countries, prime ministers, ministers of justice, supreme court justices. And had an opportunity to grapple with some very, very important issues, especially since September 11th.

AL: Right, I bet it was an incredible year. What was your message when you met and spoke in all these places?

RH: There were different messages obviously. When I did foreign travel, there was obviously a tailored message to the countries I was visiting. The overriding message since September 11th have been questions with regard to law and terrorism, whether it has focused on military tribunals or commissions or enemy combatants, or attorney client confidentiality as far as eavesdropping on those conversations between an attorney and his or her client detainee. Immigration issues have obviously come to the fore as a result of that, and some nations were very interested in that. But there are also local issues.

You know, when I was in Vietnam, certainly the government was very interested in the BTA, Bilateral Trade Accords, and becoming part of a global economic system in which the United

States is the acknowledged leader. Cambodia was looking for just ways to reestablish relationships with this government. We do not have a close relationship with Cambodia, I think we take issue with their government. And they were seeking to have the American Bar Association, I think, be helpful in helping them to create systems of law.

The year before that, when I was in Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina, obviously the issues, because I was, I visited that country just a few months after, visited Kosovo, the part of Serbia, visited that area shortly after the war had completed, and obviously there was a lot of institution building as far as creating of courts, and so we had a tailored message and help. You know, I mean I went there essentially on fact finding tours and to see what assistance the American Bar Association could offer.

The American Bar Association is the world's largest professional association. It has over four hundred thousand members, has a budget of well over a hundred million dollars, has over nine hundred employees. And so, and it has a very active international program, going into a number of countries and assisting them in developing institutions, helping them to develop court systems, making sure that their legal systems are as transparent as possible, making sure that their judges are free from influence. There's a lot of corruption, a lot of bribery, in some of these, what we refer to as Third World nations. And so it was just, often times just a lot of hard work, working with individuals and seeing, you know, from a political standpoint, how we could get from where they were to someplace where they said they wanted to go.

AL: And your time with the Maine Bar Association, when were you president of that?

RH: My guess is somewhere around 1986.

AL: And that of course was a much smaller scale.

RH: That was a much smaller scale, but as someone said, I actually, you know, I tasted it and I liked it, you know, so my involvement was clearly more focused. But we, you know, that year basically we, I remember two things that we really worked on very hard, which was delivery of legal services to the poor, increasing the access, something that was very committed to doing ever since my first year of law school when I, that summer after my very first year I came back to Portland, I worked for Pine Tree Legal Assistance and saw first hand the pretty dramatic need of legal services by the poor. And I think I, early on in my legal career, I got a pretty good understanding of what would happen if the Pine Trees of the world didn't exist, if lawyers didn't donate their time free of charge to help people who are less fortunate than themselves, to do pro bono work, which is what that is referred to. And therefore, as president of the Maine State Bar Association, and as president of the Maine Bar Foundation, made a very strong commitment to work in that area.

And indeed, when I became president of the American Bar Association, the two commissions, two of the commissions that I created and what I had hoped to focus on primarily, if not entirely, were areas relating to creating greater access for the judicial systems to those who couldn't afford it. We created two commissions, in fact. We created a commission on loan repayment, and we created a commission on billable hours. And I was able to come back to Maine and ask Frank

Coffin, who as you know is a retired former chief judge of the first circuit, to co-chair the loan repayment commission, which is a commission that is seeking to provide funding, and encourage others to provide funding actually, it's not a funding source, but to encourage others to provide funding for attorneys who are willing to make the commitment for a number of years to work in non-governmental organizations, to work for the poor, such as Pine Tree Legal Aid, maybe work for an environmental group.

The problem in the new dynamic that is created is, has been created, is that lawyers, or law students rather, now graduate with eighty, ninety thousand dollars of debt, which is very unlike what the situation was a generation ago when I graduated with maybe a few thousand dollars of debt. And as a result of that, because the salaries in the private sector have increased fast enough to help law students pay off that debt, and the salaries in the governmental sector, or in the legal aid sector, have not increased fast enough, is that people are voting, you know, they're taking those jobs which pay a lot more money so they amortize their debt. I mean, if you've got eighty or ninety thousand dollars of debt, it's pretty tough to take a job that pays thirty thousand dollars when you've got a job that's paying a hundred thousand dollars staring you in the face. In Maine we don't have that large a dichotomy. In New York it's even worse. In New York the average first, you know, first time employee in a legal aid society makes maybe thirty-four thousand dollars, even in a district attorney's office it's about the same, and yet you could start in a large law firm for a hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars, and possibly get another bonus of fifty thousand dollars. So, you know, it doesn't take a genius to figure out who's attracting the best and the brightest. And even when some of the students feel very, very committed to a legal aid or environmental or other NGO and say, okay, I'm going to do this, they end up doing it just for a couple of years and you create a revolving door which the directors of these programs say just wreaks real havoc. Just as a young lawyer is beginning to understand the practice of law and would be really valuable working for that organization, they no longer can afford to and they just say, look, we've done this for two or three years and we just can't afford it.

So the hope is that we would take some of the programs that exist on the federal level, the Perkins Loan program for example, which already provides loan forgiveness for physicians who are willing to work in under-served areas, and replicate that and just say, look, we should also add attorneys. And if an attorney is willing to work for an under-served population, or for maybe even some government jobs, and therefore forego a substantial difference in salary, that person ought to have some of their loans paid off.

AL: That's a great idea.

RH: Yeah, and we've got a number of states. The commission has been very successful this past year, it's still in existence this year. A number of states have adopted loan forgiveness programs since the commission was started, a number of law schools are increasing funding for loan forgiveness programs, they're broadening the scope and what it will cover. We've got foundations involved now. So it's very exciting, and we're, I think, making a difference. And Frank Coffin, obviously, a good friend of Senator Muskie's, you know, is right in the fore of making this happen on a national level.

AL: Wow, that's awesome, that's really great. I think that'll make a big difference.

RH: I think it will.

AL: You've talked about equal access to justice, and you were also on the Muskie Commission on Legal Needs, weren't you?

RH: Right, yeah I, we actually, you know, there were a couple of us who were actually very persuasive in getting Senator Muskie to come. We haven't talked him; maybe this is a good time to digress and to discuss my history with the senator. It really is a family history.

My grandfather lived in Waterville, Maine, and he owned a dry good store, and he had an office above that dry goods store which he rented to then-attorney Muskie, Ed Muskie. And in fact, as the senator and I grew close, I learned of other contacts. He told me that my cousin, a gentleman named Ralph Nash, who lived in Waterville, ran his first campaign for mayor. That was the campaign that the senator lost. But Jane Muskie, who we remain friends with, was apparently a very frequent visitor to my grandfather's store and, I guess it was Jane Gray at that time, and you know, the families knew each other.

My grandfather loved to tell the story how after the senator won I guess his first seat to the legislature, that he was coming down from his office and my grandfather, who had worked and assisted in that campaign, turned to Ed Muskie and said, "You know, you've just become a legislator, some day you're going to be governor, and then you're going to be senator, and then you're going to be president of the United States." And apparently this is a true story. When Senator Muskie came up to Maine to give me, in the Blaine House, the, present me with the Dana Award for Legal Services, I repeated that story, the background, and the senator nodded in agreement.

So we had, there was a long family relationship, and he knew my uncle who also lived in Bethesda, who's a physician, who had grown up in Waterville, and my mom, and her sisters. And we met, interestingly enough, in Bethesda. And Senator Muskie at that time was just getting into private practice and, or had just gotten into private practice, and we were, I think we were at a French restaurant. And he and my uncle were talking, saying hello, and my uncle introduced me, and I had never met the senator before, introduced me, and he recognized me immediately because this was around '86 I guess, and he saw, '85, '86 I guess, and he had recognized me because he still was a member of the Maine Bar, and would receive the *Maine Bar Journal*, of which my picture was on one of the front pages as part of the president's page. And he turned to me and said that he had just been asked to become involved in the American Bar Association, he didn't really know much about it, and that he would love me maybe to assist him in that endeavor. And I said that would be great. And he followed up and called me and said he'd just been appointed chair-elect to some committee, and I was going to be his vice chair, and the rest is history as far as my relationship with the senator. We became very close.

We worked very closely in the American Bar Association. There was a period of time that I think he and Judge, and I'm trying to remember his name and I've just, it's just, I just lost it, I'm having one of those senior moments. But he was very, very close to a judge that came out of Waterville. Chandler, Judge Chandler, and Nancy Chandler.

AL: Okay, Bruce and Nancy.

RH: Bruce and Nancy. But apparently all had not gone very well because Bruce, as a lawyer, had been asked to represent I think the Pittston Corporation in developing some, was it, some, I can't remember, but it's an area that was very close to Campobello Island.

AL: Yes, and it was an oil -

RH: The oil refinery, oh yeah, an oil refinery, absolutely. And I don't think the senator was real happy about that. And in fact, my understanding is that he and Bruce and Nancy, who used to be very close friends, the friendship suffered as a result of that. But I was working with Senator Muskie, and actually we had just, he and I had decided to put on a program, and we got the president of the American Bar Association to bless the program, and it was on the Iran Contra. And we put on an incredibly well received program in Philadelphia, as part of the American Bar Association's mid-year meeting on Iran Contra. And obviously, I was the former chair of CLE in the state of Maine, so I knew how, the mechanics of how to run one of these programs, and what to do and how to interface with the American Bar Association people, and could, you know, basically run interference on that level.

The senator obviously could get anybody he wanted to to appear in that program, and he did. I mean, Brent Scowcroft before, you know, Brent was, received the position he was. Norman Ornstein, who before he became as well known as he'd become over the years. And Senator Tower I think, I think Senator Mitchell, I mean just pulled these people together, and we had a wonderful program. I mention this because it was at that time that I invited Nancy and Bruce Chandler, who were also attending the meeting, to dinner. I think I was Maine Bar Foundation president at that time, as well.

AL: And Nancy was very much involved in the Maine Bar -

RH: Nancy was the director, she was the director of the Maine Bar Foundation. And I invited Bruce and Nancy to dinner, and the senator, and it was the first time that they had broken bread in a number of years. And it was a, it was clear that these were a couple of friends who had, were looking for reasons to be back together, and that was very well. And I think they continued a friendship, and I think Nancy and Ed Muskie became very, very close, closer than probably they had been before after that meeting. And indeed, at another ABA meeting, I'm sort of jumping around but sort of pulls you, pulls it all together for you and gives you the insight of how certain things happened as much by happenstance. You know, we started with the happenstance of my happening to be in Bethesda, Maryland, at a French restaurant that the senator had been. Otherwise, I don't know whether any of these chain of events would have occurred.

But the next event that occurs is bringing Senator Muskie to Maine, back to Maine. And I was at a, it occurred at an American Bar Association meeting, Nancy had asked me if I would invite the senator to dinner with her and with, oh, again the names are, I'm forgetting a, the woman who was president of the Maine State Bar Association before me, worked at the Bernstein firm, is

now at UNUM, and I don't know why I'm forgetting her name.

AL: I can't think of it either.

RH: She was a close friend, actually. I think of her as a close friend.

AL: That's okay.

RH: And I picture her clearly. But anyway, we had dinner. It was an incredibly cold day in Denver. It was so cold that week in Denver that in fact it was, we had asked for a really nice table, which was to look outside at the window. But there was frost inside the window and the senator was not a happy man. We had to bring in some space heaters, I remember, to just thaw the table around us. It was not an auspicious start, but at that time we popped the question, and we said to him we had an idea. And the idea was to create this commission and to have him be chair of the commission. And, you know, we attempted to sell it, and I think the selling point was, this will provide you an opportunity to come back home, this will provide you an opportunity to travel throughout the state, talk about an issue that we know you feel passionate about. And he got back to us and he said yes, and became the chair of the commission.

AL: Well now, and he was quite involved in the commission, he wasn't just a figurehead, was he?

RH: Absolutely, he was not. He said he would only do this if he, you know, determined himself that he had the time. Because if he didn't have the time to commit to the project, he said, he didn't want to be a figurehead. And he was real clear that he didn't want to create a report that would wind up on a shelf somewhere, and not be an action plan. So, I think, and at that time I was involved on the national level, and I think the program and the plan that we came up with was probably one of the best in the country, and due primarily because of Senator Muskie, and having such a distinguished individual to carry the torch.

AL: And so what, did he go around the state speaking to -?

RH: Traveled around the state, and we held hearings, and he was at these hearings. I was not as involved in that at the time. He was still involved in the American Bar Association, and every single meeting we would get together, and there are plenty of anecdotes I could tell you about that.

AL: I would love to hear some.

RH: I'll throw a couple at you. But he would travel throughout the state, and his firm, Chadbourne, Parks, was very, very, very helpful in this regard, they wanted him to do this, they were very supportive. And wherever he went, obviously, there would be a tremendous amount of press. And single handedly, in addressing the legislature, and he was able to address it at joint session of the legislature, you know, which very few people can pull off, but obviously he did it and laid down the marker for what needed to be done. And those things that have been done over the last several years, or you know, while he was alive and since his death, can be attributed

in large measure to the work that he did at that time, to the vision that he articulated, and to the challenges that he set forth.

Let me, because they're in my mind, spring a few. We got to know each other, as I said, through the, you know, working with the American Bar Association. And what you had to do is you had to go to these meetings, and there were three or four meetings every year. And so the two of us, I was sort of a super advance man I guess at that point, but the two of us, you know, became friendly. For me, he became an incredibly wonderful mentor. I learned so much from him over the number of years. And indeed, you know, in part became involved in the American Bar Association, and ultimately became chair of the section that had appointed him chair of the committee, that's the way it works, there are sections within the ABA and the sections have various committees, and he worked for a committee for a section. Ultimately I not only became chair of that same committee that he was chair of, but became chair of the entire section, which is, you know, is in part the reason why I became president of the American Bar Association. So there's, one can, there's always the connection in these things. And clearly, you know, I'm mindful of the fact that if it were not for Senator Muskie's asking me to become involved in assisting him, I may not have been the president of the American Bar Association, that's how interconnected all of this is

But we would take trips sometimes, and it was, and usually it would just be, it would be just the two of us, because Jane didn't go and my spouse didn't go, so we would travel. And we would actually, we'd have a lot of fun on these trips. He was noticeable wherever he went, I mean this is a person who had been senator, you know, many years before that, obviously been secretary of state for a period of time. But we would be in Philadelphia and we would, you know, be just looking around and just doing some sight seeing, maybe go over to the Liberty Bell. We went to, went down to Virginia and we visited some of the historical sites, you know, the Revolutionary War time.

Wherever he went, he would attract a crowd and people would ask for his autograph. He was always extremely nice, extremely, you know, delighted to talk to people. And what was also fun, and quite frankly was a bonus that I soon learned to anticipate and got very used to, is that we would go to a place and, you know, like in Yorktown, and all this, and we would be just visiting by ourselves, and he never, there was no pretentiousness about him, he was very unobtrusive. And all of a sudden, he'd be recognized by one of the guards, or the director, you know, and before you knew it, we would be given a guided tour. You know, nothing that we asked for, but it would just happen. We would be given a guided tour, you know, and it was just incredible, you know, just around that.

We went to Hawaii together at a meeting, and he, and we were together, and he said, you know, we got to visit Senator Enway, I think. And so we visited the senator who happened to be there. And he said, well, you've met with the governor, and now, so all of a sudden I found myself with him in a limousine going from the senator's office to meeting with the governor, to, well gee, what are you guys deciding to do? Well, we haven't anything, well here, let me set you up, to all of a sudden going to some, on some adventure in Hawaii, which was just obviously, and at that time that family was with me and, you know, he was very, very gracious, and we took the entire kids.

We, the thing I remember sometimes is that he, is that we did force him to do a few things that he might not have ordinarily done. I think it was good for him, getting some exercise. I remember we were in San Francisco once, and he wanted to take a cab and I said, "No, we'll walk," and we started walking up one of those hills and he just looked at me, and it was not an endearing look. And I was reminded, I sort of reminded myself of the fact that this gentleman did have a temper. He had mellowed a lot since I met him, but certainly I had known of his temper. We immediately grabbed a, he wanted to take a cab, and I saw that there was one of those tram cars coming, in San Francisco, what are they, what's the, what are they referred to? Not tram cars, but -

AL: Trolley?

RH: Trolley, a trolley. And he was really, he wasn't really sure about that, but I egged him on, I said, "Look, we could be waiting for a cab forever." We got on that trolley, and I remember he actually enjoyed it, his eyes looked out, everybody was looking at him, they knew who he was. And, you know, so when we went down, we were going up from the Union Square area down to Ghiaradelli to, actually to have an ice cream sundae, I remember, because we would do that once in a while. Jane should not hear some of the things that we would do, but you know, I'll digress in a moment and tell you about one thing. We would, so we would go down, we went down to Ghiaradelli and you know, walked around the, because that's where the harbor is, and walked around the harbor and then came back. And he wanted, we were going to do, there were cabs all around, he didn't want a cab anymore, he wanted to take the trolley. So he got involved and could be persuaded to do things.

Another sort of digression that I remember is that we would be eating together a lot, and many times, most of the times, almost like say every single meeting there, at least one dinner or sometimes it was a buffet. And so he'd always, we'd, you know, just get our buffet entrée and everything, and he would never go for dessert, because Jane had told him not to have dessert. And he wanted to be able to truthfully tell Jane that he had not gotten dessert, which is what he would tell her. Which was accurate, but he would send me to the buffet table, telling me exactly which dessert he wanted. And I'm sure he reported back to Jane, "No, I did not get myself any dessert." And he was technically correct, he did not get himself any dessert. I was the gofer and got him dessert, more often more than one dessert. So we, you know, there were personal times like that that I remember.

He would stay at our house sometimes when he was coming into Portland, and we have a large house and the guest complex, guest room and bathroom and everything was on the third floor, and that was really a little too much for him to walk, so we gave him Miriam's room. But the problem, Miriam had a pet hamster, so we really weren't sure how he would take to the hamster. But, you know, I remember the very first day, with some sort of trepidation, saying, "Would you like us to move the hamster?" Oh, no, it'll be fine sort of thing. And he had actually become, befriended after a few stays at our house the hamster. Very easy guest. I mean, he didn't want anybody to wait on him, he didn't want anybody to make a fuss over him. He just wanted, you know, to be treated as an ordinary human being. Although he was clearly much bigger than life.

AL: I'm going to turn the tape over so we can keep talking.

End of Side A

Side B

AL: We are now on side B of the interview with Mr. Robert Hirshon. And you were talking about some of your recollections of times with Senator Muskie.

RH: We would visit him, you know, down and visit him and Jane, we'd make it a point to all go out to dinner together, you know, when he came up. I saw Jane by happenstance I guess maybe eight months ago in a restaurant in Bethesda, outside of Bethesda, near Washington, and we got together.

AL: Did you ever experience Senator Muskie's sense of humor?

RH: Yeah, I remember he loved puns, even though they could be absolutely horrible. And while I can't remember any of them, you know, I just remember that he loved, loved these puns, and he would just crack them all the time. They would crack him up even if they didn't crack anybody else up. I do remember one joke he told because it happened to be in Hawaii. I don't know why it stuck in my mind, but he was the first person that told me the joke. And you may have heard it but I remember it from him because we were going to Hawaii, as I mentioned. And he told the joke of his grandson getting on, I mean he'd sort of personalize it, grandson getting on his knee and saying, "Grandfather, will you make the sound of a frog." And grandfather, you know, he asks him, "Well, why do you want me to?" He says, "Well, mom says that when you croak we'll all go to Hawaii." And for some reason that joke has always stuck in me, because I think, I think I remember that because he laughed so hard after he said it.

AL: It's interesting for me to hear you talk about the connections that your family had with Senator Muskie before he was senator, in the Waterville area. And you not meeting him until 1980s?

RH: Eighty-six, '85, '86, yeah, about '85.

AL: But you were at least in your mid-thirties by then?

RH: Yeah.

AL: But you must have heard a lot about him and knew him from stories?

RH: Exactly, and that's, you know, I think, there was knowledge when he was running in 1968. We would, you know, I obviously knew the connection, and I was in Ann Arbor at University of Michigan, and certainly worked for his election, he was vice president, running for vice president in '68 with Hubert Humphrey. My recollection's somewhat faded, but I think that was the case. And, you know, attempted to you know help organize students at University of Michigan to vote for him. But it was just, it was sort of that. I mean, I knew, you know, he went down to Florida and my grandfather said that he was delighted that then candidate for vice

president recollected my grandfather, you know, when he was, my grandfather had moved down to Miami, for the winters anyway. You know, and so there were sort of those stories, stories of the senator, and stories of Senator Mitchell, actually, as well, because they all lived in Waterville. And they all lived, you know, Waterville's a small city and I think people are close to each other.

AL: So what did you, you came to meet Senator Muskie with a certain perspective, or how did your perspective -?

RH: I didn't have, see, I had a, I did have a perspective, you know, I did not have the perspective that many people who worked with him closely had, okay? You know, I did not know him for his famous temper. I did not know him and appreciate at that time his intellectual capacity. I mean, you know, he was brilliant, I mean absolutely brilliant.

AL: In what way?

RH: One of the smartest people I know.

AL: How did he go about -?

RH: He had incredible insight in being able to parse out a problem, okay, and figure out what was causing the problem. He was very, very quick, excellent memory, excellent memory. And he had the ability, and I appreciated this I know, and we would talk about this because he was a debater and I was a debater, you know, in high school and a little bit in college. And he had the ability to advocate for a problem, but also see the other side. Or advocate for an issue, I should say, and also see the other side. And he had that debater's ability to almost argue out of both sides of his mouth. He could take a position and he could give you, and for a lawyer ultimately, that's a real art because basically you get to see a problem. And what he saw, and for a politician it's a real art, because you can take a problem and you can say, okay, this is a possible solution and here are the advantages for this solution, and here are the disadvantages. And Senator Muskie had the ability to articulate, to see, determine, and then articulate the advantages and the disadvantages as well as anybody that I knew. Advantage and disadvantage to a problem. Passionate, too.

You know, I will tell you, and this is just an opinion of mine, but he started reading, and I can't remember the author, I think it was the trilogy on the Civil War, and he loved that. I can't remember who wrote all those. They then, the public broadcasting station, PBS, took those books and turned them into television programs, movies, segments, and I just can't remember who was the author. But he had read each and every one of them, and he would talk about those, and he'd talk about them, I remember the context, he would talk about more people dying, more Americans dying than in any other war, when he referred to the Civil War. And he would talk some of the things, and you would see tears beginning to form in his eyes. And I will tell you of a poignant moment, that he was talking to a group of people and Nancy and I were there, and you could see, you could see his sensitivity come through, and we looked at each other, and we gave each other a knowing glance.

And I've never shared this with anybody before, and I hope Nancy doesn't feel uncomfortable that I'm sharing it for posterity now. But after that talk Nancy and I immediately said, contemporaneously with each other, he cried in New Hampshire. You know, I don't know for a fact whether he did. We all know what happened, but you could see the sensitivity. I mean right now, in today's politic, and the politic of the last ten years, grown men can cry, you know, it shows that they're human beings. Senator Muskie was always a human being, he always had that sensitive side to him, I suspect. And, you know, I just remember that as sort of an event that is sticking out, and Nancy and I immediately, you know, going up to each other and saying the exact same thing at the exact same time. But we never, I never discussed that with the senator.

We discussed what he told me were his economic reasons for pulling out of the campaign, notwithstanding that he was ahead in Massachusetts. I think at that time that he was still alive and we had these discussions, and I'm thinking this is the case, that there was government financing, public financing of campaigns. And he stated, I think somewhat ruefully, that he would have, if there had been that option available back then, he would have been a candidate right through the end, you know, and he would have received the Democratic nomination. But it was his decision to pull out of that race. And my conversations with him led me to believe, and others who were much, much closer than I was, much, much closer than I was, but my conversations with him led me to believe that he pulled out not because he didn't think he could win, but because he was not willing to mortgage his financial future. Which tells you something else about the senator, you know, his frugality, okay? And, you know, just the economic background which he grew up in, and the economic background in which he lived. He was never a very, very wealthy man.

In part he was fortuitous that he owned a large piece of property in Kennebunkport, or is it Kennebunk? In which, you know, he, and I know, we talked, because I knew him while, it was being carved up and everything, and we would take trips and visit the property. He'd come up here and he'd say, "Hey, I want to go down, let's go down." So we, you know, why not, and he'd drive down, and I would drive him down, and we'd take a look at the development as it was springing up, and we'd go into his house the day. I remember when they had the pipes burst or a huge flooding or something and we went and, you know, to his house, and we made a couple of trips as his house was being repaired and done. And he was, he'd take quite pride, great pride. He was never very wealthy.

I think he got a certain amount of security through his law firm, and through the property. But he had chosen a life of public service, and he made that clear to me in some of our conversations. He had made it clear to me that he was very much aware that there was a fork in the road and he knew which fork he had gone down. And he stated it as such, not in those exact terms, but he stated it in terms of that he knew he had, at some point in time he knew he could have left the Senate and become very wealthy. But he had consciously decided not to do it, and he never regretted that decision, at least in any conversations that I had with him. And he stated very, very strongly and unequivocally that public service was the greatest of all service.

AL: Ralph Nash, his campaign manager for mayor.

RH: For mayor, was my cousin.

AL: In Waterville, was your cousin. And that was when he, Muskie, Senator Muskie ran against Russell Squire, was that the name? Or do you recall?

RH: I guess so, I don't recall. Obviously, I wasn't alive, or if I was, very young.

AL: Did they ever talk about what that was like?

RH: He didn't, except with a twinkle in his eye said, "You know, and I lost that one." Because he was the one who told me, I didn't know, I mean I didn't know a clue and no one in the family had ever mentioned it to me. And he was the one that said Ralph had. So he was as much aware, if not more so, about my family as I was aware of him, so he certainly knew that. But he, you know, we didn't really discuss much of that campaign other than the fact that at some point he'd let the little dig in that he lost that. Although he didn't say he blamed it on his campaign manager, but nevertheless, he lost.

AL: What -?

RH: Go ahead. I was going to say, I was going to throw in, because I'm remembering bits and pieces, you know, little bit of recollections, that's maybe the easiest way. I remember one time when I, you know, I was just delighted, quite frankly, to have found somebody who was so willing to provide his time and insights to a world that I loved, which was politics and international relations and etcetera. And that I never asked him of anything except once, and I didn't know how really to do that, but I just sort of came out. And it was for my daughter who I had hoped, you know, this was sort of a father projecting on his daughter, would become a Senate page. But he was no longer a senator, although he did joke at times, he said, you know, if I had stayed in we might have made you a judge. And I, you know, my retort was, you know, if you stayed in I wouldn't have met, we wouldn't have met.

But what he did, I asked him I remember, we were driving up to Augusta and so I told him that Sarah was, my daughter, was, who he knew, was thinking of applying for a Senate pageship and would he put in a good word to Senator Mitchell. Now, I knew that would be tantamount to Sarah being given the pageship. And I remember he turned to me then, he had a dramatic flair to him when he wanted to, and he would say, "You know, Bob, he says, I rarely ask George for any favors," he says, "I try not to." And, you know, at that point, you know, my heart sank and I said, ah sh--, you know, why did I ask him to do this. He says, but, but then he, you know, let the time pass as my heart sinks, and then turns to me as I was driving and says, "but you know, I'd be happy to do this." And Sarah became a Senate page.

AL: How did she like that?

RH: Oh, she loved it, she absolutely loved it. And she got a, in all that, she got to see the way things worked in Washington, and I think public service is now a part of her life. She's working for a large law firm in Philadelphia, (*name*), but having said that, she, there's a public service side to her that remains, and I'm sure as time goes on that side will come out in the type of work that she does.

AL: What do you think Senator Muskie's contribution was, largely in Maine, and nationally?

RH: I think it's, well in Maine what he did is he helped create the economic vibrancy. You know, President Johnson gave him the two Model Cities, because he was a floor manager for a bill that was the, you know, just the core of the Great Society, which was what President was running on. Or not running on, but which was his, was sort of what he was trying to create as his legacy, the program, and Model Cities was very important and people didn't think Model Cities was going to go anywhere. And Senator Muskie as the floor manager, you know, made it go somewhere. So in a very real sense, what he did is he helped contribute to the Maine that we see today. Without, I'm convinced, without the Model Cities Program, without all the federal funds it brought to Portland and Lewiston, without the ability of a population to see a brighter future, Maine would be much worse off than it is today. That's a very parochial concern, but it is a concern of somebody who's lived here all his life.

On the national level, I think he brought honesty and integrity, and he was a shining example, and a shining contrast to what was then existed in the White House. The fact that we had a president who had to say, "I am not a crook," you know, says it all. I mean, we know President Nixon's history, and we know the shame and the dishonor that he brought upon the body politic, through his lies and deceptions. Senator Muskie showed the country that there was another way. Now, he didn't win, but he demonstrated that there was another way, and a better way. And so I think that in a global sense.

Now, in a more specific sense he's obviously going to be, he's going to be remembered for, you know, as the father of environmental law, you know, of the ability to take that horrible assignment that he was given by President Johnson because they crossed swords, and other people I'm sure have talked about that story and have greater insights than I do. But, you know, he took his committee chair and he made it into something that was worthwhile. And really created, in that sense, or helped to create, he didn't create, but he basically provided the subsistence, the sustenance for the body of law that we call environmental law, through all of his energies. And you can't help but think that has had and will continue to have an incredible effect upon this nation.

He also did something that he was proud of, because he mentioned it to me. You know, I think he was the chair of a budget committee, or Senate budget committee, and this was the first rigorous review of the budgeting process. And it's something that we effectuated finally during President Clinton's administration. But, you know, here was somebody who understood, and I think it's just because he came from Maine. He understood the need to balance the budget, he understood the need to keep expenditures within income, and believed that very strongly.

AL: Is there anything else that I haven't asked you? I know one thing I wanted to ask you, you mentioned as a student at Michigan getting people involved in voting for Senator Muskie in '68.

RH: Humphrey and Muskie, yeah.

AL: Is that the extent of your political activity, or have you been involved in other things?

RH: I've been involved in other things sort of tangentially. Obviously my association activities have been where most of my political focus has been, but I've always been a student of politics and enjoy the political scene and have stayed, kept myself abreast of current events. And that was one of the reasons, I mean, I would enjoy Senator Muskie's company because of just the ability that we, the hours that we had set aside that we could talk. He obviously loved politics; I did, too, and I just loved to listen. And he loved to talk, so it made a very what they call symbiotic relationship. So, you know, we would talk about foreign events, we'd talk about, you know, when we were, the Gulf War, I seem to have a recollection of discussing that with him. I was arguing of the Japanese, you know, needing to pay for certain things. I mean, we, and he was arguing why we shouldn't do that as a matter of foreign policy. Actually it was the oil embargo, you know, some things leading up. So, you know, while I have never engaged in politics in the direct sense by running for public office, my involvement and the abilities, or the knowledge that I had in dealing with some of the public figures that I had to deal with during this past year, obviously I learned a lot from my time with the senator.

AL: Is there anything I haven't asked you that you feel is important to add?

RH: Not that I can remember. I'm sure there'll be something that comes up, but that's always the case.

AL: Well, thank you very much for your time, I appreciate it.

RH: You're welcome.

End of Interview