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## Johnson, Philip Neil "Phil" oral history interview

Andrea L'Hommedieu

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## **Interview with Phillip Neil “Phil” Johnson by Andrea L’Hommedieu**

*Summary Sheet and Transcript*

### **Interviewee**

Johnson, Phillip Neil “Phil”

### **Interviewer**

L’Hommedieu, Andrea

### **Date**

October 27, 2000

### **Place**

Lewiston, Maine

### **ID Number**

MOH 225

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### **Biographical Note**

Phillip Neil “Phil” Johnson was born August 14, 1919 in Standish, Maine and grew up in Westbrook, Maine. His parents were Clarence and Mary (Jesson?) Johnson. Due to illness, he was confined to his bed until 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. He won a scholarship to Tufts University for theater, graduating in 1943. Phil began working at a radio news station in 1942 and later became the news director for Maine Radio News Service. He first met Muskie in Waterville in the late 1940s. Through the 1950s, he followed Muskie’s career as governor. He played a large role in the transition from radio to television news. His news program (Channel 5) was the first on Maine television in 1953.

### **Scope and Content Note**

Interview includes discussions of: family background and education; the Danish community; theater at Tufts; getting started in radio; competition among newspapers in Maine; first impressions of Ed Muskie; entrance of television into news; Muskie’s compatibility for television; Muskie’s 1954 gubernatorial campaign; reporting on the turning point in campaign; Don Nicoll; influence of television on politics; television and the newspaper in coexistence; coverage of Muskie in New Hampshire; and Steve Muskie sliding down the banister at the Blaine house.

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Coffin, Frank Morey  
Crocker, Robert  
Cross, Burton  
Damborg, Peter  
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Goulding, Ray  
Goulet, William "Bill"  
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## **Transcript**

**Andrea L'Hommedieu:** This is an interview with Mr. Phil Johnson on October the 27th, the year 2000 at the Muskie Archives at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine and this is Andrea L'Hommedieu. If I could start by just having you give me your full name?

**Phil Johnson:** Phillip Neil Johnson.

**AL:** And where and when were you born?

**PJ:** Oh, that's a long time ago. In Standish, Maine, 1919, August 14th.

**AL:** And did you grow up in Standish?

**PJ:** No, the family lived in Westbrook. I was born in Standish on the shores of Sebago Lake.

In 1919 my father moved the family to Westbrook and I grew up there.

**AL:** And what was the Westbrook community like at that time?

**PJ:** It was a paper making company town, so to speak. Suburb of Portland, but in that day pretty well removed, not feeling that close to Portland, it was pretty much an independent paper making community.

**AL:** And what did your, what were your parents' names?

**PJ:** Clarence was my father's name; Mary Jesson Johnson was my mother's name.

**AL:** What was her middle -?

**PJ:** Jesson, Danish lineage, there were a lot of square heads in Westbrook. As a matter of fact we lived on the edge of what was called the square head community. The other side of the river was French town.

**AL:** Oh, okay. And what did your parents do for occupations?

**PJ:** Well my mother was most of her life a housewife until my father's health failed. He worked in the paper mill, much to his disgust, because he had grown up in Fryeburg and on the shores of Sebago Lake where, for nearly a half a decade, he had been handling the water level of Sebago Lake, and handling it meant patrolling it every day. So they lived on a farm in Standish where I was born.

**AL:** And was this the S. D. Warren mill?

**PJ:** Yes.

**AL:** Was the Warren family still around -?

**PJ:** Oh yes.

**AL:** - and prominent at that time?

**PJ:** Oh yes, yeah.

**AL:** What sort of influence did they have on the Westbrook community?

**PJ:** Oh, I don't know that there was much influence felt. I'm not able to recall anything particularly except the house that they lived in and the, actually the superintendent of the mill, and there were a couple of them that I can recall the names of, who were probably more prominently recognized than the Warrens themselves.

**AL:** Now, I understand that they had set up, the Warren family, a library that was used for the

employees and was later open to the public.

**PJ:** That's right.

**AL:** And I don't remember what year it became public, but did your, was your father and your family, did you use that library?

**PJ:** I can remember going there. It was a relatively small library down in the Cumberland Mill section. The Walker Memorial Library in Westbrook, which still continues, as does the Warren Memorial Library, was, the Walker Memorial was the big one. The Warren Memorial was relatively small, but there were lots of school programs that were oriented to the space there, and I particularly recall a lady who was a member of the Goodall family with textiles in Sanford, but she lived in Westbrook, and she was the librarian, tiny white haired lady who was quite popular with the youngsters, and that's about the most I remember about Warren Memorial Library from those early days. I think it was opened, to the public that is, about the time that I was in seventh or eighth grade of Forest Street Grammar School, and we did start having meetings and class trips over to the Warren library. That's about all I remember about it.

**AL:** Now growing up in that community, what did people do socially? Was there a social center in the town?

**PJ:** Well, pretty much related to the churches. The community that I referred to as the square head community, were members of the Danish Lutheran church which still maintained Danish language. I took my bible instruction and so forth in Danish with my grandfather guiding the way. My grandfather, who lived with us, was a retired employee of the Warren mill, and he and his Danish associates were part of my recollections of growing up.

**AL:** Were there particular traditions in the Danish community that, say, other parts of the community didn't participate in, or part of the culture? Was there a, did you feel -?

**PJ:** Maintaining the language as much as anything. Christmas time was somewhat different kind of celebration, a little more somber in some respects than was typical in the other areas of the community. And I don't know whether it's just because I can still taste it, but the cooking was awfully good in those Danish households. Lots of cheese, lots of rich food. And I spent about ten years of my childhood confined to a bed frame and the response from the families of that neighborhood I remember was part of every day life, but a blessing to my mother who got a lot of good cooking. Her own, but they also helped her a lot. And in terms of my own predicament, from the time I was a first grader until I was a third grader I was not able to get to school so, again, the blessings of living in that community helped me a lot. Probably I was not as well aware of it as my folks were.

**AL:** Now, you went to the Westbrook, through the Westbrook school system?

**PJ:** Yes.

**AL:** And did you have any teachers or anyone there that inspired you to become a reporter or

to go into radio, or where did that, where did it come from?

**PJ:** Yes, I think it probably started then. In the high school, and by this time I was physically well recovered, I wanted to play sports but I got persuaded to get interested in theater by a woman by the name of Nan Hatch, who was an English teacher, but who was very enthusiastic about drama club and developing theater productions, and so I, I wasn't a very good short stop anyway, so I wound up being an actor in that group. And so that was a major influence. Westbrook High in those days was a winner in several of the tournaments that were held, one-act play contests and that sort of thing, and the Bates Theater festival, which we were winners in one year. That exposure led me to be particularly interested in what the newspapers had to say about us, and when a, some of the reporters came by to talk with us about what we were doing, I was usually more interested in what they, the reporters, were doing than what we were doing and I got it under my skin of wanting to be the guy who asked the questions rather than made the answers.

About that time an English teacher at Westbrook High School, her name was Francis White, started me being interested in what I was going to do for college. These were deep Depression years, the family had no particular resources, but she encouraged my pursuit of English and eventually I won a four-year tuition scholarship at Tufts College in Medford, Massachusetts. Part of the qualifications in winning the scholarship, it was divided by four that year, one for an athlete, one for math person, one for an acting or theater-interested person, and one for a writing interested or author type person. I won the theater one, obviously, and so that got me into what at Tufts was called Pen, Paint and Pretzels, the theater club. And again, in the Boston area it was a winner in many of the public oriented events. From that I chased the idea of working nights to pick up some more money and got myself a job at one of the few all night radio stations spinning records and trying to think of something to say that was of interest, and that started me on the broadcasting track.

**AL:** So that was in the late thirties.

**PJ:** That's, no, that was in the early forties.

**AL:** Early forties, okay.

**PJ:** Right. When the war came along in '41 I got classified 4F and I was still in college so that's when I began the broadcasting thing. And I chased that a while particularly because I was hoping to get a chance to do some newspaper reporting on the scene of what the action was at that time. This was in '42, I graduated in '43 from Tufts, the class of '43, but at that time it was possible for us to hasten up the course program and get early graduation. So as a result I finished my career at Tufts academically in December of '42, and at that time I was working for the *Boston Herald* as a copywriter, reader rather, and that tied us in because at the time the *Boston Herald* purchased a radio station which is now, and then was too, WHDH. The insertion of the newspaper ownership in what had been a broadcast station oriented particularly to the fishermen at sea, we did fishermen's weather reports every fifteen minutes all day long. However, the managing editor of the *Boston Herald* persuaded his management people who had just purchased this radio station to switch the emphasis from weather to news and diminish to some extent the

music and comedy programs because the station was not a network station, it was an independent station. Bob and Ray were the morning team that went on to be known as Bob Elliott and Ray Goulding on the networks, and I did the morning news and one noontime local interview type of program. And we did that for about three years at WHDH.

Then I moved from there to WNAC, which was setting up what was to become the Yankee Network News Service, and by getting in there I got a chance to do some traveling on outside of town assignments, which was what I was after. I never did get to the war zone but I did get to England and reported from London a few times on the troop transports, which was as exciting as the war experience could get for me at that time, but it did get me into it. Came back in the mid forties to working with the Yankee Network News Service. The stations in Maine that were owned by the Rines family in Portland, in Bangor and Augusta, formed the Maine Radio News Service and I became the news director for that service, and that's where I got involved in the news in Maine and became acquainted with the Muskie story.

**AL:** Now tell me, where did your story begin in Maine, who were some of the first people you worked with and what exactly were you doing?

**PJ:** In Maine, you mean in terms of the news coverage?

**AL:** Sure.

**PJ:** Well, news broadcasts at that time were largely a matter of doing news in the morning, at noon, early evening, and late evening. The concept of having news every hour on the hour was not in vogue at that time. It was strictly a, usually about a ten or fifteen minute newscast in the morning, as it had been in Boston, and now in Maine. It was a network service in which the stations in Portland, Augusta and Bangor all broadcast the first part of each fifteen-minute period, which originated in Portland. And then the local news people in Augusta and Bangor, along with the local weather bureau, not the weathermen at the station but the weather bureau in that area, provided the remainder of the newscast. The beginnings of interest in political news reporting when the legislature was in session prompted our developing a little more of a format for those news periods so that each day the morning newscast and the early evening newscast included a political legislative, political-slash-legislative, report. And we staffed the Maine Network News Service accordingly. Jim Brunelle, who was a columnist for the Portland newspapers, became our first political reporter assigned to do nothing other than chase the politicians and report on legislative developments. Another one was Floyd Nute, who went on to the United Press.

The competition between the newspapers in Maine, the Portland newspapers Gannett owned, and the *Bangor News* and the *Lewiston Sun-Journal* heightened the competition for broadcast news attention and consequently some of the management team of each of those stations began to urge more time and more staff for those purposes. The stations in Lewiston owned by the Hoy family and the station owned by the Rines family in Augusta prompted an expansion of political reporting on the broadcast media in the middle of the day by staffing, adding people and setting up in Augusta at the State House, a broadcast news desk, much to the chagrin and annoyance of people like Rab Talbert, who was the political editor of the Portland papers, and Doc Arnold

who did the job for the Bangor papers.

**AL:** So they were seeing this as a competition (*unintelligible phrase*).

**PJ:** We were in competition, yeah, so we were chasing stories and trying to confirm stories and looking over our shoulder to see if that guy from the paper was following us. Oh, he was probably doing the same thing with us. We were obviously a little more apparent, because in order to do anything for broadcast news coverage, you had to carry at least two big suitcases full of equipment and stick a microphone out in somebody's face. So it was obvious that the guys with a notebook in their pocket and a pencil in their hand could get by a little less obviously than we could. But it did add to the competition and that competition was pretty sharp in election years, and obviously the broadcast people were beginning to realize that politics paid good income source for broadcast time.

The Associated Press and the United Press obviously had close ties with the printed media; the *Press Herald* picked up stuff from the newspapers and relayed it on their wire, and again the source for the broadcasters was to buy the Associated Press, United Press wire service and have that available in the newsroom, which made the news more readily available and the invitation to use it more frequently, get it on the air more often, began to break up the pattern of quarter hour newscast, which was sometimes pretty thin by the end of the quarter hour, and became a pattern of doing them more frequently during the day for shorter periods of time, relying on the wire services.

But that got under my skin and others in the broadcast business because one thing we did not want to do was be broadcasting a news story at noon time that had already been on the page one of the morning *Press Herald*. But it was hard to do because we didn't have the resources to get those stories as readily as the newspapers did and with the wire service in the newsroom you were stupid not to use it, but more frequently now it became even more competitive, because if we could get a story that was ours we sure as hell weren't going to share it with the newspapers. And the wire services began to make their presence known. United Press, first of all and particularly, by buying into the arrangement that provided purchasing of stories from the broadcast media to go on the printed facsimile or printing machine and be distributed everywhere. That was not too long in being, there was not too much resistance to that for very long. It was obviously a benefit to everybody. But at that time we did not have the sophisticated, as it became, recording equipment so it was always the printed word that was disseminated rather than the voice. But then by the early fifties the recording equipment got diminished in size in terms of the remote stuff, you could carry it around in one hand instead of two arms and a shoulder, and also the capabilities of editing tape, audio tape, made stealing news stories from the air common practice so there was no way to keep the barrier up once you went on the air with a broadcast, a news story, everybody had it. Occasionally there were phone calls to see if they could find out some more, but in those days, and I'm talking late forties and through most of the fifties, the news department of a radio station was a guy in the morning and a guy and a girl maybe in the middle of the day, and another guy at night doing the broadcast and more and more the day stretched but not with too much additional help. You did more newscasts but not with any more voices or people. But with television on the horizon that began to change.

**AL:** Now when did you first meet Ed Muskie? Or hear about him and start -?

**PJ:** Well, we heard about him and when we began to, well I heard about him when I was working for the Yankee Network News Service because in those days, although we operated mostly from Boston, we were able to send a crew out now and then to do a, quote, remote, end quote, broadcast and the, I would say it was probably after the decline of the war news in the middle forties politics became more and more a topic to generate some interest in. And I, if I remember correctly, the first time I personally met Ed Muskie, I did a story from Waterville for the Yankee Network News Service, which included a, I'm fuzzy on what the controversy was, but for some reason or other the two persons that I remember from that remote broadcast, of sitting down to make it a lengthy interview discussion with, were Frank Coffin and Ed Muskie. Both of them were local politicians, they were not in the state wide field by that time, but, at that time anyway, but I can't remember what Muskie's role was in Waterville except that it was obviously a politics or political story.

**AL:** Was this in the late forties or the early fifties?

**PJ:** Early fifties I would say.

**AL:** Yeah, yeah, at that time he was, in the late forties he was in the state legislature, he also had a law practice in Waterville so it may (*unintelligible phrase*).

**PJ:** Yeah, the state legislature probably is where I first got the lead to him. But for some reason or other there was an occasion before the forties, before the fifties, in that period in the middle forties when I was working with Yankee Network News Service and the war was still on, and we did a story in Waterville. I'm sorry I can't remember what it was, but I remember meeting him, being impressed by him because here was a guy who looked like Lincoln and talked like FDR.

**AL:** So you were really struck by him the first time you met him?

**PJ:** Yes, yes.

**AL:** And Frank Coffin as well you met.

**PJ:** That's right. And it seems to me I met them at the same time, but I'm not certain of that. But I know that I, when I came away from the interview in Waterville, driving back to Boston, I was particularly impressed with the way, the physical stature of this man and I described it as Lincoln-esque in the, he was pretty gaunt and pretty tall and lantern jawed and so forth. In the legislative sessions that he was part of, that was a period, I think, when in terms of the state of Maine, this was a overwhelmingly Republican state and the only Democratic voices that you ventured to talk with or pay attention to were Papalugia in Biddeford and what we, I guess, called the Democratic bosses of the time, the machine guys, who had control of the Democratic vote largely because of the French Canadian families that dominated the industrial towns, and Louis Jalbert in Lewiston who was obviously a powerful politico of the old stripe.

And when in the legislative days began to talk differently about some of the legislative issues than Louis Jalbert, it was an interesting story, and I think that's what made that particular event in the old Augusta House an interesting one, when Ed Muskie and Frank Coffin, and Louis, all asked us to come over and get acquainted with what was going to be a new voice of Democratic Party and a new attitude by the Democratic Party different than it was in the Biddeford and Lewiston areas, and much more related to challenging some of the Republican moguls that were around. So we went to that meeting and it was there that my recollections of Ed Muskie really began to take, make big differences.

The other thing that I remember well about Ed Muskie was that television was beginning to come in and the Rines family, again, the people who owned the radio stations in Portland, Augusta and Bangor, established television channels in Portland and in Bangor and the Hoys, who had owned the radio station in Lewiston, had the UHF channel ownership in Lewiston.

UHF preceded VHF on the air into people's living rooms because it was first licensed and so Lewiston was the first licensed broadcast television operation, and then we followed in Portland and Bangor. Bangor, in that sequence, Bangor first and then Portland. But, it meant new material for a new medium, but the staff tended to be the same. The people who had been doing radio were assigned to go do this television thing and again, we bumped noses and shoulders with the specialty reporters from the newspapers, particularly in the political field as far as I was concerned. And Jim Brunelle and I in that period were trying to combine both radio and television, with radio reports again at those particular times and television reports only in the early evening and late evening so that the, again, here we go with heavy bulky equipment once again for television added to the news conferences that were being held. And obviously because we needed lights, we needed space, we needed lots of room, the newspaper boys either decided to get the hell out of there and let these guys have it for a while, or else they got there first and made us wait. So it was a tic-tac-toe deal.

More and more though it began to be accommodating and the, some of the early news conferences held by governors were a resolution field I guess you could say, to getting the media, the print media and the broadcast media, to work somewhat together and respectful for each other. Pete Damborg, from the Portland papers, was a little more amiable and adjustable than Ralph Talbot was, and Doc Arnold finally came around although he was a tough one to come with. Dave Langzettel, who was in the wire service business, again had problems with having news conferences in which the broadcast media turned his lights on and got all the attention.

However, one of the big features that I recall about Ed Muskie, and this I had in mind, thought about it before we sat down here, one of the reasons that Ed Muskie made out as well as he did was beyond being a new kind of Democrat, he also was very sensitive to the idea that long windedness made for an awful lot of editing back at the studio and so he learned to use the thirty second sound bite very readily. Maybe Don Nicoll helped him, I don't know about that, but probably Don did. But the old routine of the early television days of having a reel of film to go back, (we shot it in negative so we didn't have to bother), but we still had to edit the sound track, and for a two or three minute, and that's a lot of time on television, cut or excerpt in a television news cast you spend an hour at the editing table cutting out what you wanted to have aired. So

obviously, you were pretty effective editors and it took time to do it. When Ed Muskie came along and could say it all in a couple of minutes it was a lot easier and you didn't have to spend all that chopping time.

**AL:** Did that make him more likeable?

**PJ:** Oh yeah, sure, got him a lot of airtime, but it also made him a very important political figure. It was, it was a lot easier to anticipate a couple of good questions and quick and brief answers from Ed Muskie than it was the typical political figure of the day, who usually, once he saw the lights on and the microphone in his face, started making a stump speech.

**AL:** I'm going to stop right here and flip the tape over.

*End of Side A*  
*Side B*

**AL:** We are now on side B of the interview with Mr. Phil Johnson. And you were talking about some of, the time period when Ed Muskie started doing some TV spots and the industry was converting from radio to television. I had a question about that, what, it must have been a lot of learning on the job, the staff that was of radio going into the television business.

**PJ:** Oh, it was.

**AL:** What was that time period like? It must have been exciting and it must have been stressful too.

**PJ:** It was, it was stressful certainly, particularly in the, if you had been as I was accustomed to the radio routine of being able to make, to cover probably four or five stories in a newscast; in television to do that, and you by that time had decided that's the only way to do news, you had to do a lot of news stories. Otherwise people would just read the damn newspaper and get it all, so you had to do a lot of stories. And in doing that in television meant you had, probably for each story, some team or somebody who's going to have to go somewhere and do it. The idea of having public figures come to the studio was the answer we made at the time, but on the other hand if you did that, you sacrificed the authenticity of their being where they were when they made the story. The governor in a studio B setting, in a broadcast studio, was far less authentic than he was sitting at the head of the conference table at the State House, with the reporters and their notebooks on each side, that was authentic.

But, while that news conference probably took forty, forty-five minutes, you had to cut it to two minutes. And so that was stressful, and for the management of the broadcast stations, the expenditures were stressful as well. And so consequently the acquisition of the equipment, while television was very sophisticated in its equipment, it needed a lot of workshop stuff that was hard to come by and expensive to reach. So that was . . . but it did do, in terms of the replacement of radio news, a complete job.

Radio news faded from the scene and hardly any radio news for a long period of time was a part

of the broadcast format. It restored itself with the on the hour every hour thing, but for the fifties and early sixties nobody paid any attention to radio news and sort of, it absorbed television, that is, absorbed a lot of personnel from the radio side. It tended to bring the people who had been working in radio stations in many, many localities in New England to the few localities where television was. In Maine, of course, it was in Portland. Bangor was basically a satellite operation to Portland, although there are people in Bangor who'd have my neck for saying that. But it was the Mecca of, or not the Mecca, but the base of equipment to do the job was in Portland. And the staff to handle the equipment was in Portland. The Lewiston stations were virtually a newsman who was a news reporter, a news director, a photographer and a sound man. In Portland we had two more than that, that's about the difference.

In terms of the relationship with the print media and the television media, we did have that thing in common which the newspaper side had used and now would begin to use even more of photography, so the importance of having a well lighted event was as valuable to the news photographer as it was to the, necessary, to the television camera man. And that lasted for quite a while, until videotape came along with its sophistication that now we see, which requires very little equipment in terms of bulk.

Another thing I remember about the Muskie days in television, the, we had to bring the film back to Portland to be developed and then edited and spliced together to go up for the newscast. The governor's office had an announcement to make about an arrangement or an agreement with Governor Muskie to go ahead with collective bargaining of state employees. We did the film in the middle of the afternoon. It was about four o'clock before we got out of the State House and headed for the Portland studios. I was in my car moving right along trying to make it when the flashing blue lights pulled me over. I thought, "Well, I got caught." But I did venture to explain to the trooper that I was, and he did say I have seen you on that tube, but I was trying to get back to Portland with a film in which the governor has just announced there's going to be collective bargaining for state employees. The trooper said, "Leave your car, get in mine," and we traveled down to Portland and made it in time.

**AL:** Oh, that's a great story.

**PJ:** So those are the kind of things you remember. But Muskie is part of those. The other thing which was happening in terms of the legislative programs and the attention that television could pay to them, with the inaugural ceremonies and that sort of thing being staged for ceremony, there were adaptations that were needed to make it fit for television. And again, with that, in the fifties, well, Governor Muskie was doing his thing in the governor's office, the legislature's political makeup shifted to a more prominent Democratic presence there, and so consequently we had the makings of forums, of bringing together Democrats and Republicans over issues that could be broadcast at a time in the evening when presumably there would be more people watching television.

But another thing that was difficult at that time was persuading management to fit it in, because the network programs of those days were built into households. You never missed the Jack Benny Show, you never missed Truth Or Consequences, you never, and that time of day were sacrosanct, you don't do, as pressing as the political issue is, you don't interfere with those times

or you lose ratings. That's still true, but in those days it was particularly difficult because you not only have to have a place to do it (*unintelligible word*) State House location, and you have to have the equipment to relay it to the broadcast scene, and you have to have the people participate. But those were pretty exciting years, because it did happen, because it had to happen, and more and more during the, during that period where Muskie, in his political period of ascendancy, those things happened with him in the foreground, from the Maine scene anyway. And then of course it came to a national scene.

**AL:** Do you have any recollections from your perspective as a TV person and reporter of the, of Muskie's run for the governorship in '53?

**PJ:** Oh yes. Again, the year '53 was the first year that Channel 6 went on the air. We began broadcasting television signal in December of 1953, so the year of 1953 was a year in which we were preparing for television. It also was a pretty exciting year in politics, so that added to the staffing because we had to have people. We had a television staff working on building a broadcast studio for television, and we had people running around trying to do radio as it was still being done in terms of the election year, so it was a hectic year.

**AL:** Now were you yourself out chasing stories and following Ed Muskie or was, did you have someone on your staff?

**PJ:** Jim Brunelle, I think, was by that time, doing most of the chasing after stuff. There were, I can't remember how many people we had, but we had, we had I think probably a half a dozen people at that time in the broadcast news staff combining radio and television, but radio was far more the time assigned than television was. (*Unintelligible word*) other than the fact you had photographers, we had one at Channel 6 who was chasing around with a movie camera. The teams that went out to chase the campaign were largely the radio team along with a photographer who grabbed what he could. It was not oriented to get audio for television then, you got the audio for radio because it was easier to get, and then you had a film, which went along with it, and here and there you could grab a piece of a sound bite from somewhere, maybe something you made in the last time you went to the State House and the governor was talking at the news conference. You could take that off the film, splice it into the otherwise silent film that was running, and that was the split you had. And in the, in the election year coverage, we didn't have that aspect of background library stuff in television news, so it was merely a matter of a report of what was going on politically, and you sat in front of the camera and read it instead of having film to show it. But that improved pretty fast; by the end of the fifties sitting in front of a camera was a smaller part of the broadcast time as you could make it.

**AL:** Now I suppose because the Democrats made up such a small percentage of the legislature in that year and there had not been a Democratic governor for twenty years, that it must have been quite an election. Did you, because you had already formed an impression of Ed Muskie from the times you had seen him prior to his running for governor, did you have a sense that, or when did you have a sense, at what point, that the ball was rolling, that this guy might actually become governor? Was it a -?

**PJ:** I think it began that night in the Augusta House, I think a great many of us figured, in that

session, when they talked about what they wanted to do and the short time they had to get it done, that this guy was not the same cut of cloth that we'd always known, and this was going to be a different kind of election in that it would not rely on the, it would be more likely to be a new and different phase than the old guard machine produced figures that previously had been accepted. So I, to answer your question I think, I think the realization that this guy was going to change the Democratic vote and that that vote was going to be a melding of middle ground Republicans and young Republicans that would turn to him instead of just follow the old beaten path that the machines had developed for the Republican candidates.

**AL:** So the reaction, do you recollect the event in the Augusta House well enough to remember the reactions of the other reporters and such with, was there quite a -?

**PJ:** We wouldn't let him go, we kept asking them, after they elaborated on what they wanted to do, Frank and Ed Muskie and Louis all talking about how they were going to revive, or revise, the Democratic Party and what it was going to be like, then who's going to run for office, who's going to carry the banner, who's going to lead? And for most of us I figured well, Coffin's about the only one who is known that much and, in the interchange of that evening, more and more it became likely that Ed Muskie would be the one who would run and carry the banner and whatever.

And as I recall there was some kind of a time limit left at the end of the conf-, news conf-, not news conference, it was just a meeting, just a session, the poker game waited quite a while that night before it began and it didn't get started until late because everybody was trying to figure out: is this guy Muskie going to be the candidate? And it was pretty apparent that he probably would be. But there was a little period of time after the session broke up waiting for that announcement that he would be the candidate because Coffin obviously came to the session with the background and the smarts of a spokesman, and Ed was an enthusiastic legislator, that was about it. And it changed drastically from that time on, but at that time it was pretty interesting and somewhat confusing as to how this new format, or not format, format's a bad word, new approach for Democratic Party challenge would come together and who would be the one who would have to fire it up. And Ed was a lot more fiery than Frank Coffin.

**AL:** Now, how did Louis Jalbert fit into this?

**PJ:** Well, when you talk about fiery people you can't overlook Louis Jalbert. I think, I knew Louis fairly well before I knew these other people, and Louis' thirst for control prompted him to bite on anything that was going to be a change, and a change with promise, and so Louis was gung ho to go although he wanted, and I'm sure it was in his mind and in our mind that night at that session in the Augusta House, that Louis was the politico who might well be the candidate for governor. And the question was would Louis swallow his enthusiasm and ambition and let this new Lincolnesque kind of guy get up front, and he did, he was a strong supporter of the Democratic Party foremost, but he also was thirsty for a change that could give them statewide control of the house, which obviously he began to sense as, he was going to be majority leader, wow, he'd get to say almost as much as the governor, and he did.

**AL:** So you must have covered Louis Jalbert for many years. What was his (*unintelligible*

*phrase*)?

**PJ:** I didn't cover him actually, he just was, he was a loud-mouthed politician and always ready to say something, and usually something that was controversial so you chased him.

**AL:** Now who were some of the others besides Jim Brunelle that you worked with on a daily basis?

**PJ:** You mean at the broadcast station?

**AL:** Yeah.

**PJ:** There were not many others.

**AL:** Oh, I apologize, I'm thinking of two people and I, they probably worked for a different station, but I was thinking of Gene Willman and Bill Goulet, were they at Channel 5?

**PJ:** No, they were at other stations, yeah.

**AL:** Now when did you meet Don Nicoll, do you remember?

**PJ:** As I said earlier, the UHF stations went on the air before the VHF stations did. Parker Hoy and Frank Hoy, Frank was the older man, were the family that set up the station in Lewiston and Don was their news man and I met him that way in terms of doing the news either as a, met him on the scene of some event or more particularly swapping phone calls during the day to find out what he knew about something or what I knew about something. And planning the broadcast presence at news events, which was another thing, which brought Don and I together, I think, quite a bit, because the "news events," with quotation marks around them, that candidates or legislators or governors called, were basically for the newspaper people. And we were trying to get into the act and sometimes the strategy to do that prompted us to put our heads together and plot a little bit about how we'd be able to do it.

**AL:** So radio, so he was in radio at that time.

**PJ:** Yes, right. But he also, I guess I'd better not, I can't remember for sure but in the early television time in the fifties, with UHF television, Parker Hoy was frequently the representative in terms of the presence at a news conference or a news event. But Don was back at the station doing the news and writing some of the stuff and planning the stuff, and so in terms of trying to work into the act that was dominated by newspaper people like Talbot and Damborg and Doc Arnold, Langzettel and Crocker and those people was a strategy as well as a presence and that's when I got to know Don pretty well.

**AL:** Do you recollect his participation in the governor's campaign in '54?

**PJ:** Oh yes, sure. That's where I, again, I mentioned earlier that the two minute sound bite that Muskie was the master of, was certainly part of Nicoll's presence there, and we appreciated it

and used it, and relied on it. But he, Don's presence in that campaign also helped us make more complete coverage of that campaign that year because he knew what we were after and his candidate could be told what we were going to be after, and his candidate was what we were after, so.

**AL:** What influence do you think the media had, especially television, in that '54 campaign? Because from what some have told me that was really the first year that people in Maine could see their candidate on television. Do you think that had a big effect on Ed Muskie getting out his messages and winning?

**PJ:** Oh certainly, oh absolutely, absolutely. And it had a big effect on the media itself because more time, because Muskie was the figure that he was, that he was the kind of difference that we had been looking for or hoping for meant that we were able to persuade management to give more time to the assigned time for political coverage. When Ed Muskie came to the studio with his opponent or without him, the studio was ready and the time was assigned, which hadn't happened before in previous elections. The fact that it takes more space, more time to get out to the public, takes an incentive to provide that and I think that campaign that year with Muskie, being the figure that he was, persuaded a lot more use of time for broadcast, discussion of issues during broadcast time, coverage of political candidates in the news periods of that time, because it was, that was the first year that VHF television was available and that was when people began to buy television sets.

The UHF period, which briefly preceded it, did not have anywhere near the number of home owned television sets, partly because they were not marketed and mostly because there were no stations to carry the broadcasts until that time. In that year we became VHF television oriented and all across the state we were in the people's living rooms. And one of the most exciting news stories that could be local and that television could beat the damn newspapers in was on the air for the first time.

**AL:** How did Burt Cross come across on television?

**PJ:** Very staid, long-winded, slow, pleasant, your father image type person. Nice guy, tried very hard to provide what the newspaper people wanted, and tried to adjust to these new guys with their cameras and microphones, which seemingly by contrast, came like second nature to Ed Muskie, thanks to Don Nicoll.

**AL:** Tell me a little more about Peter Damborg, I don't know a lot about him as far as what his role was and his influence on the media.

**PJ:** I don't know that the influence on the media was particularly the factor that, the thing with Peter, he followed Rab Talbert. Talbot was a dyed in the wool conservative kind of political columnist, and Peter was obviously a little more liberal than Rab and certainly a lot more congenial and involved and adaptable to that period when newspaper and television and radio were vying for time and attention. Peter adjusted to it and became typically participant with it, where the others stayed away from us, avoided us, tried to catch the subject matter person somewhere else than near the television guys. But Peter was almost fraternal with us in terms of

sharing the same kinds of opportunities to get at the story and, and I think, also one of the things that was the fortune of the history was that Peter, because he had felt the same kind of enthusiasm for the change that was about to happen in Maine politics and didn't hesitate to write about it, sometimes to his chagrin because the papers were not that necessarily in tune with that yet. But he was, he was a part of that enthusiasm, which made the media work together rather than chasing separate paths.

**AL:** And Ed Penley, who was he?

**PJ:** Now there's an old guard guy, there's an old guard guy. Ed's place in history was in history, he was a historian, he knew all those past things. And, but he adapted pretty well to allowing some of these new people to have some thoughts too, and, but he was a pretty dyed in the wool conservative type person.

**AL:** And where did he work?

**PJ:** Lewiston, *Lewiston Sun-Journal*.

**AL:** Okay. So he must have worked along with Lal Lemieux?

**PJ:** That's right, yes. Ed was back at the editor's desk and Lyle was chasing the stories, yeah.

**AL:** And Bob Crocker you said was at, was an AP person?

**PJ:** I believe so, yes.

**AL:** So you didn't work too much with him, or what type of a person was he?

**PJ:** Well, I didn't work very much with him. I knew him only as a part of the State House crowd, media corps. We were trying to get away from calling it the press corps. Bill Langzettel was the big guy at the AP when I was doing the thing in Portland, Crocker was in Augusta at the State House, sitting on the State House news desk of AP, so the State House events, State House flow of information, the format for the information out of the State House, went through Crocker. The rest of the day's news and what have you, went through Langzettel.

The battle between media people such as broadcast and particularly our television entry was to be able to share stories but not tread on the newspaper- ownership toes which would sever the contract between AP and the newspaper, which had to be, or AP couldn't exist. United Press came along with its feet in both troughs trying to be a network of facsimile machines and printing machines in broadcast studios as well as in newspaper newsrooms. But AP was still the top dog in terms of access to information and distribution of information to the newspapers. United Press was distributing it to the broadcasting people better because it did it more frequently and it fitted its wire service and menu to the broadcast times, so we relied on them for that.

But in terms of the stuff coming out of the State House, Bob Crocker had his news to the nose, or

nose to the news, more frequently than the others did and so consequently he was kingpin in the newsroom at the State House which we all shared. I don't remember Lyle Lemieux spending much time in the newsroom at the State House. That may say something about it, I don't know.

**AL:** Now tell me, at this point I'm not sure specifically what I should ask you about your other recollections. Do you have things that stick out in your mind that you feel are valuable to talk about in terms of Ed Muskie and the advancement of different sources of media in Maine?

**PJ:** I think I've said it pretty much. Obviously the association brought to my personal career some pretty exciting things, having been with CSH and the NBC station in Portland during a time of the governor, then senator, coming on the scene. When Senator Muskie went to Washington, there were more frequent calls from NBC newsroom in Washington or New York back to the affiliate WCSH in Portland to get some more information or to get a feed from us about something that the senator was doing or the senator had done. So we got on the air nationally because we were the news source here in Maine at CSH, the affiliate of NBC. The night that he was announcing his candidacy, I had put my name in and I spent the night over there in Cape Elizabeth waiting for the announcement to be made and wondering when it would be made and how it would be made. And then doing the twenty seconds of introduction from there, an opportunity to be there that I wouldn't have had if it hadn't been for the way things worked out.

**AL:** Now did you follow Ed Muskie through his career either professionally or personally, did you feel a sense that you believed and continued to believe in what he stood for as a figure?

**PJ:** Oh yes, yeah, always did, yeah.

**AL:** What do you think it is that he, that he most gave to the country and to Maine?

**PJ:** Hmmm.

**AL:** They may be two different things, what he gave to the country may be a bigger or different thing than he gave to Maine.

**PJ:** Yeah, I know that, that I, like a lot of other people, almost, well, when he was knocked out of the race by the power of the Loeb newspaper in New Hampshire, it was a personal emotional experience to me because the beginnings that I had realized in Augusta had reached it's, virtually a peak with his candidacy. And then to be wiped out by what we knew to be a false thing. It was not Ed Muskie breaking down in tears, that doesn't happen. It may have been a touchy point to sling something at Jane, but that was typical of the Republican period that Ed emerged from, typical politics. That wouldn't get to him the way they depicted it and, so consequently it was an emotional thing to me to realize that his fortunes were being diminished by what he had learned to overcome earlier.

Have another little episode that's not related to this at all, but I've been thinking about it and I wanted to get it in. Again, in those early days of television when we were carrying equipment around and having to put lights on to see what we were showing, we made one of the probably

the, well it must have been the first visit inside the Blaine House with camera equipment when the Muskie's lived there. And it was a thing that we put a lot of thought into how we would go about it. Murray Shepherd, who was our photographer, had some lights on a bar that went on his camera so he could hold it up and light what he was going to be shooting. And he also had a set of lights that were stationary to aim at a particular focal point for the sound camera to do its thing. I remember walking into the hallway at the Blaine House and suddenly being aware of the bar lights being on and going over my head. So I looked up to see what they were looking at, where the light was, and here was Stevie, the Muskie kid, coming down the banister, sliding on the banister down the stairway at the Blaine House. We got it on film, we hesitated to use it but I'll never forget seeing it happen.

**AL:** Oh, that's funny.

**PJ:** Back to what other things happened, I don't think of anything right now that, well organized, the, being out at Chris Pachios the night, Chris Pachios' house the night that the media, the networks picked up the pooled broadcast from there, is one of the big events of my recollection. John Martin was running the show in terms of background and in the background, but the, I was tucked over in the corner with a microphone that was into the - . . . .

*End of Side B*

*End of Interview*