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## Mills, Kay oral history interview

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## **Interview with Kay Mills by Don Nicoll**

*Summary Sheet and Transcript*

### **Interviewee**

Mills, Kay

### **Interviewer**

Nicoll, Don

### **Date**

July 1, 2003

### **Place**

Santa Monica, California

### **ID Number**

MOH 404

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### **Biographical Note**

Mary Katherine “Kay” Mills was born on February 4, 1941, in Washington D.C. to Mary Sibold Mills and Morris Hammond Mills. Kay grew up in the Washington D.C. area and graduated from Chevy Chase High School in 1959. Mills went directly into journalism after she graduated from Northwestern. Her first job in journalism was with the United Press International in Chicago, where she worked for 3 years while in graduate school. Mills began working as a journalist on the Muskie 1968 vice presidential campaign. Mills was also involved with Muskie’s Senate reelection campaign in 1970. Mills covered Muskie’s withdrawal from the presidential race in 1972 when she worked for the News Bureau in Washington.

### **Scope and Content Note**

Interview includes discussions of: personal background; getting involved in politics as a journalist; influence of parents; connection with Edmund Muskie; 1968 vice presidential campaign; 1970 Senate campaign; end of the Muskie campaign; job at the News Bureau; recollections about Muskie and the 1972 campaign; and Muskie’s opinions about women working in politics.

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## Transcript

**Don Nicoll:** It is Tuesday, July the 1st, 2003. We are at the home of Kay Mills in Santa Monica, California. Don Nicoll is interviewing Ms. Mills. Kay, would you state your full name, date of birth and place of birth, and the names of your parents?

**Kay Mills:** Okay, full name is Mary Katherine Mills, Katherine with an 'e', and I was born on February 4th, 1941, in Washington, D.C. My parents were Mary Sibold Mills and Morris Hammond Mills.

**DN:** And you grew up in the Washington, D.C. area?

**KM:** That's right, yes.

**DN:** And graduated from Bethesda High School?

**KM:** Bethesda Chevy Chase High School in 1959, and then did my undergraduate work at Pennsylvania State University and a master's degree from Northwestern University.

**DN:** And did you go directly into journalism from your graduate work?

**KM:** Yes, from Northwestern. I originally wanted to be a foreign correspondent, but I didn't have a job being a foreign correspondent, so while I was still in graduate school actually, I got a job with United Press International in Chicago, working on their broadcast wire, the copy that went out to radio and television stations for the rip-and-read kind of people. And I worked there for three years, and then went to Baltimore for two and a half years working for the *Evening Sun*, the afternoon paper in Baltimore.

**DN:** I neglected to ask you, did you have any brothers or sisters?

**KM:** No, I'm an only child.

**DN:** Welcome to the club.

**KM:** Right, right.

**DN:** Now, you worked in Baltimore, and what led you to go to work with Senator Muskie?

**KM:** Well, you kind of have to think back on what the times were like then, because I came of age in the sixties, and you had, I was too young to vote for John Kennedy, I certainly would have, but he inspired many people to do many things. And then you had the civil rights movement, particularly in the South, and that was on the front pages. I was not brave enough to go south as some of my acquaintances were, but I was in a civil rights march in Evanston while I

was in graduate school. And then while I was in Baltimore you had both Martin Luther King being killed, Robert Kennedy being killed, riots in Baltimore, which were right almost in my neighborhood, after Dr. King was killed. So it seemed to me the whole country was in turmoil at that point.

And I was a young journalist, I was twenty-seven when King was killed, and I began to want to do more than be a journalist. But as I said, I wasn't particularly brave. I also, while I might have been interested in doing some work in the cities, the cities, and particularly urban black youths, didn't particularly want Whitey working there. I had studied African history but, and made some offers to work with some groups about African history, but it was a very hostile feeling, and I could understand why. So I thought, well, these are not avenues you are going to be able to do, and at that point I couldn't see that I was really going to accomplish all that much as a journalist. So I thought, all right, let's think about politics. I mean, who knew that politics wasn't necessarily going to accomplish any more or not, but I certainly hoped so, thought so. So once I made that decision, then I started to think about which politician, and hands down it was Muskie because he had run in '68 for vice president. He just seemed to be a voice of reason in a world going somewhat mad, so that I decided I wanted to see if I could work for him.

**DN:** To what extent did your parents influence your interest at that time, your interest in journalism and in public policy issues such as civil rights?

**KM:** Well, my father was career military, and he had died in 1960, so I don't think other than just a basic sense of fairness that he had that he particularly had any influence on my politics. My mother, who died about four years ago at ninety-one; so I hope I have her genes. My mother was a southerner from Virginia and I think a very humane person. Not a particular activist, although she was very active in the Methodist church. So I think in terms of my political beliefs it was more, my mother was definitely a long time Democrat. I mean she voted for Eisenhower, but I think that was, you know, an aberration, but otherwise she was staunchly Democratic. And so I was a Democrat, I was a border state person, so I wasn't reactionary in terms of racial values. But I don't think, I think it was more just a basic sense of fairness, as I said, they weren't particularly activists in that sense.

Now, in terms of going into journalism, my mother was a high school English teacher so I liked to write, I liked to read. I had an uncle who was a journalist, who worked for the *Roanoke Times*, and I guess I initially kind of got interested in journalism because he didn't have to go to work until noon - - that seemed like a pretty nice thing - - then whenever I was visiting there and there was a fire siren or anything like that, we could call him at work and find out where the fire was. Well, for an eight year old this was pretty cool. So that, and then my father had a good friend who was a journalist.

And then, you know, I also think one of the other things was there weren't very many fields that a woman could go into. We're talking the fifties when I'm thinking about this. Nursing, I hated the sight of blood; secretary, I didn't want to be a secretary. I knew even then that they didn't get the pay and respect they deserved. And teaching was the last option. I saw how many papers my mother had to grade, and I thought, I don't want to do that. Well, and on television there was May Craig on *Meet the Press*, and even though I didn't realize at the time that she wasn't taken as

seriously as the male journalists were, nonetheless every Sunday, or most Sundays, she was there asking questions of important people. Well, the fact that I liked to write, and that I didn't want to do the other things that girls were supposed to do, made me think that maybe journalism was possible. And there were just enough women in the field that you could get into it, and I did.

**DN:** And then you decided you wanted to do something, accomplish in politics and you were interested in Senator Muskie. How did you go about getting the job?

**KM:** Well, it's probably the first time I ever learned about crusading for something or working the system, because in getting journalism jobs, if there was somewhere you wanted to go and you knew somebody then they told you who to contact and you contacted them. And in those days, jobs in journalism were pretty open, I mean you could get a job somewhere, not like today. But the world of politics, I didn't know, and as you know, I was not from Maine. So I thought, well, okay, who does know Muskie? And my first contact was Ted Lippman, who was a *Baltimore Sun* political reporter and who had covered the 1968 campaign. So I went to Ted, because I tended to wander all over the building and know a lot of the people, I went to Ted and told him what I wanted to do and he said, "Well," the person that he thought might know somebody on the staff was Ted Venetoulis, who at that point I think was working at the University of Maryland in Baltimore County. He later went on to be in the county government in Baltimore. And from your records, you would know whether he was a speech writer or an advance person or what with the campaign in '68, but it was my understanding, and probably at the time I knew what he did but have forgotten.

And at any rate I saw him, and I think I knew him casually, and went to talk to him and he said, well, he'd call the office and see whether, he knew certainly the staff had had to gear up, was there an opening. Well, it turns out, they were looking for an assistant press secretary, which was the only job that realistically I could fill. Or they weren't, but they decided that was the only job I could realistically fill, and he made I guess a contact with Bob Shepherd. And then it took a little while, but then Bob needed help, and I was it.

**DN:** And you came on board and what was your first impression, first of Bob, and then of the operation?

**KM:** Well, you know, as somebody who had grown up in Washington and who had gone to the Senate, my mother took me there to listen to some Senate debates and to meet our senator who at that point, I think, was the very conservative John Marshall Butler. And Millard Tydings, Butler defeated Tydings. And so, and maybe that was a little bit more of where my political interests. I'd been exposed to history and museums and so forth. But my, I was thrilled to come to work at the Senate because I had seen the Capitol dome lit up at night since I'd been growing up and, you know, I knew that this was where things got done, or undone. So it was thrilling to get a chance to just actually really walk into that Senate office building, then called the OSOB, and know that I worked there. I liked Bob instantly. He was obviously hard working, he was obviously committed to the senator, he knew the press, he was funny and he was irreverent, but when the work needed to be done, you know, it got done. And, you know, here you had, it was a small staff, by Senate staffs.

As I'm remembering there was you as administrative assistant and Gayle Corey, and three or four legislative assistants, Jane, Lee Enfield, Jane Fenderson [Cabot], Lee Enfield [Lockwood], maybe one other person, a couple of case workers, and various secretaries. Pam Jones was, no, I think at first, when I first went there Janet Plourde was, from Lewiston, was Bob's secretary. She went back to Maine, and then Pam Jones became the secretary. So there were the three of us in this office, that magazine article sort of brought it back to me, that we had three desks, a teletype machine, Pam's plants, stacks of newspapers, telephones ringing all the time. So it was a busy place, and I was certainly glad to be there.

**DN:** When did you first meet the senator?

**KM:** Well, it was probably, this was, that's an interesting question. It was probably ten days or two weeks after I had been there, and I remember I thought it sort of odd that I didn't meet him right away and telling my mother that, and she thought it was odd, too. I knew he was busy. I could certainly go see him at a committee session or on the floor, but I actually didn't meet him. It could have been as much as two weeks, but it was probably about ten days. And he was very gracious, he, we didn't have a long chat as you might well imagine. Probably something was needed and I did it and met him, and was quite pleased to have met him. But it wasn't like lightning struck or anything like that. But I was pleased to meet him and then get past that sense of, well, you know, isn't it odd that I hadn't.

**DN:** And this was not a case of Bob or someone else bringing you in and introducing you to the senator, it was in the course of work I take it?

**KM:** I think so. And that, you know, it's thirty-three years ago, that I don't remember. I just do remember, I think it was in his office, and that I probably had some, and it may have been, I'm sure someone, because otherwise how would he know who this person was who came in. It was probably either you or Bob, and probably Bob, which would have been appropriate, you know, and whatever it was I had to do, we did and, you know, went on my way.

**DN:** What were the demands on you at that time in terms of work?

**KM:** Well, basically I think Bob was sort of handling the main, the principal reporters who would contact, who needed the big picture, or the statements about issues that were coming up. I was, I fielded a lot of the phone calls and would sort of filter them for Bob. I would write press releases and then Bob would approve them. That was something I knew, you know, would write straightforward, a news story that you might want to have cover a speech text. I would take them over to the Senate gallery; I would help with some mail that involved press matters. There was, as you would remember, there was a ton of mail coming in at that point, a lot of people liking what they'd seen in '68, wanting to volunteer, wanting to help in some way, wanting to know the senator's position on this, that and the other, so we all would pitch in and go through some mail and target it for the kind of responses that you could have that were already prepared, and if something, some new issue came up then we'd try to draft some correspondence to respond to it. But I think the basic thing was there would be twenty five press calls a day or something like that, and so to handle them so that Bob could concentrate on calling somebody who needed his hand held or something like that, or providing information to the *New York Times* or *The*

*Washington Post*, or Don Larrabee of the Maine newspapers.

**DN:** During that time, did you get a sense of the senator's mood, and also what the office staff felt about the upcoming 1972 campaign?

**KM:** Yeah, and this evolved, obviously, as the year went on. I think everybody was, particularly those who worked on the '68 campaign, seemed while overworked because of the demands that that had, the attention that that had generated, I think everybody was operating under the assumption that Muskie would run in '72 and that they were pleased with that, and they wanted to do whatever they could to get that underway. And Muskie I think, you know, seemed to come in and out about this. This is my recollection, anyway. There would be days that he was absolutely, you know, pointed in that way and would do what he needed to do, and there were days you could tell that, probably fund raising days, that he didn't like, and that, well, we've done this already and why did he have to do it again, and he'd be cranky. And I didn't see, there was one occasion I saw that, and I may even have the date in an old calendar, but I think there was, certainly in the first six months or so that I was there, there was a lot of excitement.

You also had somewhere, and I need to check the dates on this, somewhere along in this you had the Vietnam veterans camped on the Mall. And you had the McGovern-Hatfield resolution about the war that was coming up. So there were a lot of issues in addition to Muskie's normal environmental or Maine issues. There were a lot of international issues that he was having to focus on, and that generated more interest. And I seem to recall that John Kerry was one of the Vietnam veterans who was frequently in the office, and Lee Enfield dealt with the veterans most of the time. She was the one who was nearest their age, although I wasn't that much older but I had a different department. But there was a lot of that stuff that was going on, and I think, at least in the first six months, everybody was quite upbeat. And then when, and again I can't remember dates, but when the office downtown, which, was that K Street, or was it L?

**DN:** K Street.

**KM:** K Street, yeah, because it was just referred to as K Street.

**DN:** (*Unintelligible phrase*) L Street, and then K.

**KM:** Yeah, so when that office was set up there was starting to be that kind of tension of who was doing what and who was getting the attention, and so there seemed to be that division. But until the Senate reelection campaign in the fall of '70 I think, you know, everybody was really, the Senate office was kind of, at least publicly where it was at, and then Maine, and then after that things changed.

**DN:** Did you get involved at all in the 1970 campaign?

**KM:** Yes, I was, I worked in Maine, it was the first time I'd been to Maine, kind of interesting, for six weeks that fall, from about, it might have been two months from a little after Labor Day until right after the election. And worked in Waterville, and (*telephone interruption*). So, it was probably about two months that I was in Waterville. My role was to be in the office. Whenever



Muskie was in the state, Bob Shepherd traveled with him, and Charlie Lander, and I was sort of the person that could field, again, the phone calls, put out the press releases, a lot of stuff going obviously to the Maine press. If the senator had been in Portland and given a speech, then I'd send a release. I always felt it was a little unbalanced campaign because the senator's opponent was Neil Bishop who was not exactly a heavyweight candidate. And to send these press releases, particularly the weekly Maine papers, and see them run exactly as I had written them, and next to nothing from Bishop's office.

But that was my job, and also to feed to the radio stations taped excerpts from a speech so that if Muskie was up in northern Maine, you know, we'd have something for the southern Maine stations, and doing that kind of thing. So those were the Maine things. And then if national press called and wanted to come and follow the campaign for a couple of days, which was since Muskie was considered a front runner, and you had the *Washington Post*, you had-. I remember Bill Eaton from, I think he was with the *Chicago Daily News* then, the *L.A. Times*, Bob Maynard from the *Washington Post*, Mary McGrory who was, at that point her column was in the *Washington Star*. So sort of making sure that their logistics were handled and they knew where to join up with the candidate, and that the candidate knew they were coming and that sort of thing.

Once in a while I would get, if Muskie were somewhere nearby, I'd be able to get out and go listen, but I was basically in the office. And it was a small staff, and George Mitchell was running the office and the campaign there. I recall Charlie Micoleau and Peter Kyros, Jr. were on the staff, Ann Pomeroy, Doreen, whose last name I don't remember, sadly. There may have been one other person, but it was, we were on the second floor over a yard goods store, I think, and it was sort of like a loft office. And I do remember this was, a little off point, but this was just at the time that women were starting to assert themselves in the workplace, and there was a regular battle over who was going to make the coffee at the office, because the men would finish the coffee and leave the pot empty, and the women finally got tired of this, and we said so. And so, then whoever finished the pot was going to make it. It didn't always happen, but we were making our little breakthroughs.

**DN:** Did you get much resistance?

**KM:** Yeah, some, but you know, we, finally we'd leave the pot empty, too, and so a little cultural war was going on there. But it was, it really was quite remarkable for me, who'd never been to Maine before, to see how beautiful the state was, to meet the kind of people that were there, independent, but, you know, just very nice folks, and to have had the opportunity every morning, I'd grown up in the suburb and so to be in a small town, as it was then. And I think a campaign contributor had donated as his contribution two camps he owned on China Lake for the staff to stay in. And the men made it about two nights, it was cold out there, there was not central heating, the men made it about two nights, Charlie and Peter. And Ann Pomeroy, and I thought this was the greatest thing since sliced bread, and so we loved it. I do remember seeing that lake, and I never had a cottage by a lake, even if it was September, and I headed right into the lake and I headed right back out because I'd never been in water quite so cold. So every morning at about eight o'clock, could make that drive, in the fall, from China Lake into Waterville. It was beautiful. And, you know, I wouldn't get home until after dark, but it was,

you know, it was a twelve hour day, but it was a nice place to be. And to see how a campaign worked, admittedly a campaign that was one sided, but the point was to have a big margin because otherwise, if Muskie couldn't beat Bishop by a big margin then he wasn't going to get the nomination, or he wasn't going to be as likely. So that was our role.

**DN:** Did you have much interaction with the Waterville field office?

**KM:** Marge Hutchinson, yes, because she, you know, she obviously knew the folks and who we should be particularly nice to. I mean, we were nice to everybody, but who was an old friend. And so, we weren't in the same location as I recall, but yes, we had some interaction. And my role again, I would, I had a lot of contact with the AP and UPI heroes in Augusta. And we had a teletype machine that if you punched the tape you could then send a press release to AP, and this was pre faxes and pre computers and all of that. So I punched the tape and would send the releases to the AP and the UPI offices in Augusta. And I seem to recall that Bob Rose was the UPI person, and Phyllis Austin was the AP person. So, you know, they needed updating on where Muskie was and what was going on, and so I would keep them informed, as well as any calls from the national press.

**DN:** Did you have any chance at all to see Senator Muskie on the road during that campaign?

**KM:** Yeah, [I] went down I think to, oh, there's a town, starts with a "T" and it's on the coast.

**DN:** Tenant's Harbor?

**KM:** No, this was where Peyton Place had been filmed.

**DN:** Oh, that would be Boothbay Harbor.

**KM:** Okay, there was some place down there, near, that I went down and saw him at some occasion. The thing that I particularly remember, though, was -

**DN:** Oh, Camden, excuse me, Camden.

**KM:** Camden and something, Torrington isn't quite right, but I could find it on a map. But anyway -

**DN:** There is an Orrington.

**KM:** Yeah, but anyway. [Kay later recalls that the place name was "Thomaston"] So I saw him there. It seems to me I might have also gone up to Margaret Chase Smith's neck of the woods when he was there.

**DN:** Skowhegan.

**KM:** Yeah, one day, but the main thing that I, main two events that I remember from the campaign were, we had a lot of national press in town, and Muskie was in Waterville at either

the American Legion or the VFW Post, and he was splendid that day. And it was, and these were his people, it, they were probably conservative otherwise, but they were, he was the home town guy, virtually, and he was their senator. And he fielded questions, and of course the war was an issue then, the Vietnam war, and we had, I think Bob Maynard was there, Bill Eaton, a couple of other national people and there were just wonderful stories that came out of that which, and it gave me a chance to see him in action with people from Waterville.

And, of course, the other event that I remember, which I wasn't there for but which I certainly saw on television and saw the run up to, was the taped speech that ran after Nixon's rant, because Nixon's tape looked amateurish and there was Muskie, the voice of calm, with the water lapping on the shores of the harbor, and sounding very sensible. Nixon had been taped I think at a rally against one of the senators he was trying to defeat, because he was trying to get Gore and Joe Tydings, and maybe there was one other, Al Gore, Sr., out of the Senate. And he was just exploding, and all arms and frenzy, and there was Muskie. And I remember a friend of mine calling me after that, (*unintelligible phrase*) who lived in Augusta, who said she was so pleased to be a Maine Democrat after hearing that. So that, those were the main, the principal things that I remember in terms of things that involved Muskie.

**DN:** And you stayed in the state working through the election.

**KM:** Right, right, and we did finally give up on the place at the lake two or three nights before the election because it was November and the propane tank kept running out in the middle of the night, and one of us would have to go out and flip on the new propane tank. So we moved into a motel for about the last week. But, yes, probably stayed about, time enough to close the office after the election. The other thing that I remember quite vividly about the election, and this is when I said things started to change, was the weekend of, let's say Muskie's speech was going to be Sunday night, I'm not sure whether it was Sunday or Monday night. But the weekend, a couple of days before that, the Washington office, the campaign office, descended in Waterville, and I remember having this visceral reaction that they were taking over and that they thought we were peasants, even though we'd been up there doing all this work. And it may be a little strong to say peasants, but they certainly didn't take us very seriously.

**DN:** Who was in that group?

**KM:** I remember, I think, was it Bob Nelson who was one of the -?

**DN:** Bob Nelson worked for Berl [Bernhard].

**KM:** Yeah, and (*name*), and one or the other of them, and I honestly don't remember which it was. When they got there they, I was knee deep, it was the weekend before the election, and I was getting releases out and I was sending tapes this way. And they said would I make sure that I got their luggage to the motel. And this, you know, was not the person to say it to or the time to say it, and I said that I was really busy, and I thought they could handle that themselves. And I remember calling Jane Fenderson and saying, "Jane, I have seen future and I don't like it," or words to that effect. And I think I was right, but at any rate they came in and of course worked on the speech with Muskie, and it was wonderful. But there was a lot of tension, and of course

they were also there so that election night Muskie could call other senators and governors who had won and do that sort of thing and that was their purview and that was fine, but there was, I could start to see even more of that tension that then developed even more.

**DN:** Did you encounter Dick Goodwin at that time when he came in?

**KM:** Just, I knew he was there and I knew he was working on the speech, I knew who he was. I may have seen him a little bit, but not that much; I knew he was there and was working on the speech. But the interesting thing was there was a speech a night or two before that that Muskie gave somewhere that was very much the same message that he gave at, on this television thing. For a long time I had a tape of that. I may still have it; if I do I'll find it. But it struck me as, I think it was in Lewiston and it was always (*unintelligible word*) Lewiston speech. And he was so powerful in that. I didn't see it in person, but I had heard about it, and I heard it and it was, again, it was remarkable. I'd forgotten that until just this instant, but I'll root around and see if I can find it.

**DN:** Well, with some trepidation you returned to Washington after the campaign.

**KM:** Right, and you know, everything was fine, we were still very busy. I can't remember when it was that, Bob left the staff, you would know. I think it was sometime the following spring.

**DN:** It was in '71, which is when the real changeover came.

**KM:** Yes, right, and Dick Stewart was press secretary, and I had known Dick when he was with the *Boston Globe*, liked him a lot. So (*unintelligible word*), while I certainly hated to see Bob go, I, and fully thought that Bob could do the job, I also understood that the staff seemed to think that they wanted somebody with national press credentials. But I had no problem working with Dick and enjoyed doing it, but more and more of the press staff was coming out of downtown, the campaign office. So I went about doing what I'd done before, probably more of it. But, and I tell you, I didn't see the writing on the wall until it hit me, until I was let go in June. And I had been working my twelve hour days, I mean I'd come in to the office at about eight thirty in the morning and often Jane and Susan Gibson and I would leave about eight at night and go out to dinner after that. So I certainly wasn't slacking off, I just think I didn't have a rabbi. I had no political person that they needed to keep happy by keeping me there. And I was always a little surprised, and perhaps someday someone can explain to me why, when the campaign starts to run low on money, you get rid of somebody on the Senate staff, unless they wanted to put somebody in that job that they needed to put into it, but I don't think they did. So that's -

**DN:** Who told you you were through?

**KM:** Dick Stewart. It was not an easy day for me, in fact I kind of think I suppressed a lot of this until now. I may have made a mistake in going on vacation at this stage, because Jane Fenderson and I went to Russia and to London for two and a half weeks, figuring that if we wanted any vacation we wouldn't get it again until after, because we certainly still thought Muskie was going to be the candidate. If we wanted any time off we'd better take it now or we

weren't going to ever get it again until 1973, if then, you know, so we went. And I had friends who were working in Moscow, and we read in the *Herald Tribune* while we were there about some layoffs on the staff, but you know, I think Jane being from Maine was, if not secure at least a little more comfortable. I got, the day I got back to the office from that trip was the day I was let go. It was the same day that my little red MG sports car was smashed in the side, and so it wasn't a good day.

*(Pause tape.)*

**KM:** I mean, Dick was very nice about it. He said he was terribly sorry to do this; it wasn't anything that I had done. What they, the reason ostensibly, as I recall, was that the campaign was running low on money and they had to make some economies (*unintelligible phrase*).

**DN:** But you were on the Senate staff.

**KM:** I was on the Senate staff. I said, what about Harrington, Susan Harrington, she was the assistant press secretary on the campaign staff, why not let her go. Well, mumble, mumble, mumble. And so, you know, it was clear that I was going, I mean, I then, I'd taken my car in to get it fixed and didn't, because I was so upset didn't notice, you don't walk around the car and look at it, got to the grocery store, came out of the grocery store, saw that the whole side of it was smashed in. So here I'd lost my job, and my car was ruined. As I say, it wasn't the best day going. But I had never quite figured it out. Even though Dick said it wasn't anything I'd done, of course it was the first job I'd ever lost and of course you think, well, what could you have done, how could I have played the game better, what could I have done. But I couldn't think of anything, so. Maybe I could have been more politically, clearly if I'd been politically connected, perhaps I could have stayed on. And, of course, what was so crushing at that point was I thought I'd lost my chance to work in the White House. Now, little did I know what was going to happen. The irony of it is that I then covered the news conference in which Muskie announced he was withdrawing from the race, because I'd gotten a job at that point with the Newhouse Bureau in Washington, and so I went and covered that news conference. It's sort of a sad irony.

**DN:** Had you had many dealings, at that point, with John McEvoy and the Senate staff management?

**KM:** Yeah, yes, and always, I mean sometimes there were things that John didn't think we'd gotten out fast enough, and he's probably right but you could only do four things at one time. They had been generally pretty civil dealings, you know. But as I say, I was seeing things change and maybe didn't have the sense to be threatened personally by them. But I'd seen you leave, I'd seen Bob leave, and so, you know. And I'd seen the momentum shift to the campaign office and some people there who would call up and ask for this, that and the other when we were right in the middle of fourteen things ourselves, and they seemed to think that, and maybe they were right, that what they wanted took priority. Well, sometimes it did and sometimes it didn't, so there was this shifting of things. And you know, it's interesting, somewhere along the line, there's one thing I've thought of that, I don't remember when I wrote this memo, but I think it was probably some time in 1970. I had just read Dick Stout's book called People, about how McCarthy had mobilized so many in the '68 campaign. And I wrote a memo to the senator that

one ought to look at the kind of grass roots participation that McCarthy had generated. If I saved a copy of the memo I can't find it. Maybe it's in the archives somewhere.

**DN:** Somewhere in the archives.

**KM:** But at any rate, I'd be curious what I said. But I remember the gist of it was that McCarthy had locked Johnson out of the race because he had really gotten this grass roots mobilization, and it seemed to me that the way that the '72 nomination was going to be won was much the same because McGovern had been named to head the commission to write the rules for the '72 campaign.

**DN:** Convention.

**KM:** Convention, and nominating process, and he knew the rules and he could look at the results from '68, and that we ought to be thinking about getting, I mean there were so many people who were writing in who wanted to work for him, and we didn't have a place for them to go. And that this, to me it seemed like something we ought to be looking at. Now, I also acknowledge I carried absolutely no weight and that if anybody looked at it at all -

**DN:** You never had a response?

**KM:** If I did it was sort of, well, we'll take it under advisement, you know, or this is interesting, or something. But I wish I had saved it because I think I was right, or at least I was as right as anybody else at that point. But, you know, I was twenty nine years old and not very seasoned in politics. But Dick Stout's book just really spoke to me about that -

*End of Side A*  
*Side B*

**DN:** This is the second side of the July 1, 2003, interview with Kay Mills. We are talking about a memo that she wrote to Senator Muskie in 1971.

**KM:** Yes, or late 1970, somewhere in there. But as I say, I wasn't any more wrong than anybody else, so I'd be curious if that ever shows up. If I were in Maine and anywhere near Bates, I'd probably go rummaging around the archives to see if that showed up anywhere.

**DN:** We'll see if we can track it down. During this whole period from the 1970 senatorial campaign to your departure in June of '71, did you have any opportunities to observe Senator Muskie and his reaction to this change in the campaign?

**KM:** Yes. Sometimes if they, I wrote half of one speech for him, which is probably about what anybody wrote for him, because he never liked his speech drafts. This was an education subject, and I'd covered education. So I went over it a bit with him on that and I think he used about half of what I wrote. I had the sense, again, that he some days thrived on things. He, again I'm, this may be backing up, I don't quite remember when the shootings in Jackson State were, I think that was 1970, so we may need to back up to that. But he, you know, he went to Russia, he

was doing more of the things that a potential candidate needs to do. I think some days he really warmed to the task, and, after all, Nixon was president and he had to think that he could do a better job than Nixon, and I think he would have, too. Then there were days that you could tell he was just tired of the whole thing and hated the scrutiny, hated some of the things that he was, the questions he was asked. He was very impatient with the press at times.

The thing that I found, I found a 1971 calendar if you can imagine, and there was somewhere in here. I went with him to an interview that he gave with Elizabeth Drew, the famous Elizabeth Drew interview. And I think this was January the 19th because I have written here, "ESM-WETA taping," and that would have been where it was, at the Washington Public Television station. That week he had just gotten back from Europe, that Monday he had a news conference, probably talking about his trip, Tuesday he had this, and I think this is probably the Drew, Wednesday he did the Today Show, so. I don't have very detailed notes here, but I was the designated person to go with him to, just to carry the tape recorder and ride along with him to the studio for the taping.

And Elizabeth Drew, as she does, bore in on him, and he didn't like it. And I could see, and she probably didn't and wouldn't have cared anyway, but I could see him starting to get testy. He didn't, he was very good, he controlled it, he didn't get angry, but I knew from seeing him around the office or seeing him in other staff situations that he didn't like what he was being asked. And finally, you know, the interview was over, I think we had to get a cab on the way back. He exploded. I mean, when I walked back into the office I was shaking. I mean, he was, "Why did she ask me this! Why did she ask me that!" I had to say, you know, she's being a good journalist, which made him even madder. And, I mean he just, so-. And I think he wasn't, of course he was angry at Elizabeth Drew but I think it was more just the way of releasing the kind of tensions that he must have felt then. That was the main time that I saw it, was in that cab ride back. I was never so happy to get back in the Senate office as I was that day.

**DN:** It had become a refuge.

**KM:** Yes, and, so, I was trying to think if there was anything else that showed up at that time. I did go with the Muskies, both of them, to Portland, Maine, this is the end of January, January 30th and 31st, and Hartford, Connecticut. Joe Duffey, I think, was having something in Hartford, and I've forgotten what event there was in Portland. But I went, and I remember that we were in a small plane, and, as I recall, when they flew in small planes they flew separately. I could be wrong about that. But I was in the plane with Mrs. Muskie, and it was bumpy going into Hartford, and I thought I was probably going to throw up on the candidate's wife, but I didn't. So I remember that trip.

And then I think I went to North Carolina, Wilson, North Carolina, for whatever event, February 13th, a Saturday. And then we had a photographer, Berry Blackman, who came in and I had lunch with him. I mean, sometimes I would have the care and feeding of the lesser, although Barry Blackman certainly wasn't lesser, but of the non-*New York Times* kind of people. And I remember Nan Robertson was doing an article for the *New York Times* feature section on Hal Holbrook, when he was playing the senator on television, and he, Holbrook had come in to Muskie and to maybe one or two other senators. And so Nan Robertson, I think it's probably the

only time I've ever been quoted in the *New York Times*, asked me what Holbrook seemed to be looking for. And I don't know that I, yeah, Bob Shepherd must have left in about March of '71 because I have here, "21st party for Shepherds this week."

**DN:** That was just about the time we went to Africa.

**KM:** Yeah. And then on March the 31st I know that he was on the David, Muskie was on the David Frost Show. I don't remember whether I had anything to do with that or not - I don't think I did. And then I went, and it says here to Tallahassee so I must have gone to Florida with him. I don't know quite, or whether, I mean, why else would I have "to Tallahassee" in there if I didn't go to Tallahassee myself. Then we get into May, and it was late May that Jane and I went to Moscow and London. And then I had written "return to work - laid off." And then the next day I left.

**DN:** So it was right after you came back.

**KM:** Yup, right, the day I got back.

**DN:** You have done a lot of work in your reporting, and particularly your writing, about women, women in journalism, women and their place in society. You had a chance to experience and also to observe women in the Muskie office. Did you get a, come away with a feeling about his attitude toward women and their role in the work place?

**KM:** His attitude, I think, was pretty good. I mean, if you could do the work, fine. It was some of the other staff people that. I remember a speech writer, Jack, last name -

**DN:** Sando?

**KM:** Sando, who would come around when were, again, knee deep in work and, "Would you Xerox this for me?" Well, the Xerox machine's right there, and I knew he was under pressure, but so were we, you know, that kind of thing. Assuming that you could make coffee, that you could Xerox something for somebody, that you could make somebody else's phone calls. I worked for Bob and then I worked for Dick, and those were the people I answered to. I mean, obviously I answered to you and then to John at the higher level, but in the immediate circumstance that was where my responsibility lay. So I think with some of the staff people, whoever you were, you were, if you were female, you were not in the league with the men on the staff.

I don't think Muskie gave it much thought, and if he did and you did the job, it was okay. I could be all wrong about that. I didn't have enough dealing with him, at that level, that I would have, I never sensed his being in any way condescending to me. I think, you know, I mean for example that ride back in the cab from the Drew interview. It didn't matter to him who was there, he was going to explode whoever it was, and I just happened to be the one who was there. Kind of later felt it was sort of a badge of honor, because I had joined the group with the rest of the people who had been yelled at.



And it was interesting, you know Don, at that time, this was '70 and '71. As I was saying, this was the time where women really were asserting themselves, and the phrase "Womens Lib", which should never have been invented, but that was out there. But women were saying, we want to be treated equally. And in clothing, for example, I mean I remember that Senator Brooks' staff, and Brooks, the hall that we were on had Symington, Brooks, and I've forgotten who else, but Senator Brooks' staff, the women were not allowed to wear pant suits. I think if anybody had said that in Muskie's office we would have hit them over the head, because we were sitting down on the floor and stapling things and so forth. So there wasn't that sort of cultural politics, but it was definitely a time of change, and that they weren't very many women in the press corps, and there certainly were precious few women who were like administrative assistant for senators. And I do suspect that the women in the office probably were paid less than the men. But you could, somebody could justify that by saying, well so-and-so has a law degree, or whatever, you know. The fact that not many women could get into law school at that point, I mean, it all fed into each other. But that would be my general sense, was that particularly, I think there was a sense for a long time that we were sort of all in it together.

**DN:** Are there any other parts of the campaign or aspects of Senator Muskie that we haven't covered?

**KM:** Well, it's interesting because people have asked me, you know, years later, what did I think of, and then particularly when they know I was unemployed for six months afterwards, because in those days if you had worked for a member of Congress you were suspect then if you went back into the press corps. It's vastly changed now, it's sort of a revolving door now. But in that, I think also because I was a woman. I think, I heard of one job, and I will answer your question in a second, but I heard of one job with *U.S. News and World Report* that summer of '71, and I didn't get it. I think had I worked for a conservative senator I might well have got it. *U.S. News* was at that point still very conservative. One of the guys, I think John Mashek, who was their correspondent in the Senate, had recommended me, they turned me down. I told a guy I knew about the job, once I knew I wasn't going to get it, he got it. So whether it was gender or political, and he had never worked for a politician, so, at any rate.

But I've been asked in years since, you know, okay, you were let go, you were unemployed for six months, what do you think about this guy? I still think he would have been a terrific president. I mean, he had the legislative experience, he had the temperament when he wanted to do it. And sometimes you need to get mad, you know, you need to get angry, there are things to get angry about. I think he certainly would have been far better than Nixon. We would have never had Watergate, you know, a lot of this criminality that he brought on, and Muskie was above reproach in that regard. So I wish that things had been different and that I would have had a chance to vote for him in '72, which I would have done, without question.

The interesting thing is, I thought about this, knowing about this interview, I think there was somewhat of a sea change going on then. If you look at the presidents who have been elected since, after Nixon, after, I mean Nixon had after all, he'd been in the Senate but he had also been a vice president. But after Nixon, you haven't, I'll backtrack and make sure I'm right about this, you haven't had any members of the Senate, get elected president. You have had Carter in '76, you had Reagan in '80 and '84. Bush had been his vice president, Clinton was a governor, and

Bush was a governor. Now, whether this is just an accident of fate or whether the Senate isn't producing the kind of people that it produced in Muskie and Kennedy, because Johnson is a little bit of an accident, he probably would never have been elected originally on his own. But there was, I don't know whether there's some connection and a senator isn't, they seem to still run and still seem to think they can win, but we haven't. Whether people think governors have more administrative experience, whether the Senate is too polarized now, they were what I don't know, but that's one thing I've sort of thought about.

I don't think that had anything to do, I mean, I suspect that nobody was going to beat Nixon in '72, certainly not McGovern. He was a senator, but I mean, there are of course also three kind of campaigns: you have to campaign for the nomination, you have to campaign for the election, and then you have to campaign to govern. There are three different kinds of people. And you can campaign to get the nomination, and then the Democratic Party, as left as it was at that time, of course McGovern got the nomination. Then you're going to campaign for the election; well, Nixon was a sitting president, so, and McGovern was left of him and the war stuff was just tearing everybody apart. But then to govern, could Nixon govern? Not the second time around. So, I think, if Muskie had been able to win the first part of that triumvirate, he could have done the second, too, but you have to have that first one. So that was just things that were not particularly profound, but things that have kind of gone through my mind in thinking back about him.

My last time with Muskie was interesting to me, because at this point I was an editorial writer at the *L.A. Times* and had had a couple of contacts with George Mitchell in the meantime. Even when Mitchell went to the Senate, I mean he'd come to a book signing when my first book came out, about women in the newspaper business. George came to that. None of the other politicians I had invited came, but George was running for majority leader at that point, he knew a lot of press would be there. I think George would have come anyway, and my mother was quite impressed with him. And then Mitchell had been, in his role as the head of the campaign committee, he had been in California and he'd come into the *L.A. Times* for a meeting with the editorial page, and I'd been at that and that was great, you know, because it boosted my stock with my colleagues, particularly with my boss, because I did now know how to play the game. And I remember one time I wasn't in town when George Mitchell came to town and George asked, "Well, where's Kay Mills?" Word got back to me that he had sent his regards, from my boss, which made me feel very good.

But Muskie was in town as secretary of state, and we had a lunch with him up in the Norman Chandler Pavilion, which is the big room upstairs at the *Times* and it's this elaborate long room with a, on a pedestal at the end where there's a big round table. And so you have the political writer, you probably had the editor of the paper, you have the managing editor, and the bigger the person who comes to town, the more mucky-mucks get to go and the fewer peasants. But because I worked for Muskie, I lobbied hard to get to that lunch and I did, and as I recall Leon Billings was with Muskie. And Muskie's face just lit up when he saw me, you know, and he shook hands, how was I doing, you know. I was prepared to introduce myself to him again because it had been a long time, you know, five years or something. Leon may have known who was going to be there; I don't know, I didn't care. It was wonderful. And that was the last time I saw him in person. Muskie probably then, when did he take over as secretary of state?

**DN:** It was just the last eight months of Carter.

**KM:** So it would have been 1980, maybe?

**DN:** 1980, yeah.

**KM:** So that would have been, I had been at the *Times* then for about two years. Made my week, made my week, so. But I didn't, you know, I didn't see him, I wasn't able to get back for any of the events, you know, before he died. But that was, if you've got to have a last one, that was a pretty good one, it was.

**DN:** Thank you very much.

**KM:** Well, my pleasure. I'll probably think of three hundred things, you know -

*(Taping stopped.)*

*(Taping resumed.)*

**DN:** And Kay has thought of another thing.

**KM:** Right. This is really more of what the experience meant to me, because while the parting was not particularly sweet, the experience was quite apart from just the thrill of working in this. I saw how the Senate worked from the inside in a way that, as a reporter, I think it would have taken me ten years of covering the Senate to have learned how you can sort of figure out who you can count on, whose vote means something and whose is for sale. I saw the staff work that it took. I saw how you needed to, if you really wanted to get through to a legislator, the staff person had to know you, and then at least your message would be on the top of the stack. I saw the work that went into the speeches that political leaders gave, or didn't give. I just, I saw how the Senate worked and then on a very small scale in the campaign, and then I saw how a political campaign worked from the inside, and the tensions. You know, the tensions when somebody's looking in one direction and thinking about one level, and yet you're, you have to do the day-to-day things. So, I saw how a political works.

I got, of course also got to Maine, and that was very nice. I really did get to know George Mitchell and subsequently had some good contacts with him. But I think the main thing and the reason that I feel no particular animus, only a little bit of sadness about the thing, even though I kind of get into while I'm telling about it, is that it was a terrific experience for me as a journalist. Because then when I went back, I worked for Newhouse in Washington from '72 to '78. At times I covered Congress, I mainly covered the regulatory agencies but I covered a lot of the consumer protection bills and issues related to communications, hearings, Phil Hart's anti-trust hearings which were seminars on monopoly. I knew better how to do that because of having seen it from the inside.

Eventually, yes, I would have learned those things, but I don't think there would have been anybody even at that stage particularly caring to teach me that within the press corps. I didn't

particularly have mentors in the press corps either, or at least not until I met Eileen Shanahan who then became a mentor and a guide for me, and that was toward the end of my time at Newhouse, and she really became a great sounding board for me. But before that I was learning on my own, and I had to be a self starter because the bureau chief at Newhouse wasn't going to particularly help me. But I think because I had worked in the Senate, I knew at least who to ask about things, and I knew how hearings were set up and I knew when you were being spun even though that term wasn't in use then. And therefore I think it helped me so much, and I made some lasting friends out of it, too. So, and that was the, on balance, that's why I look back on it as a learning experience and a good one.

**DN:** Thank you, Kay.

*End of Interview*