3-5-1999

Nutter, Fred oral history interview

Don Nicoll

Interview with Fred Nutter by Don Nicoll

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee
Nutter, Fred

Interviewer
Nicoll, Don

Date
March 5, 1999

Place
Portland, Maine

ID Number
MOH 070

Biographical Note

Fred Nutter was born on September 11, 1933 in Sanford, Maine to Betty and Arthur Nutter. Nutter had aspirations to be in broadcasting, and after serving in the Navy, went to Emerson College. While at Emerson, Nutter would return home to the Sanford area on weekends to help operate WSME Radio. In the early 1960s, Nutter moved to the Portland market, working for WPOR Radio, and by 1965, WCSH Radio as a newsman. WCSH eventually transitioned over to a television station. His reporting career took off with his assignment to Portland City Hall. He then went to Augusta as a state house correspondent, a successor to Jim Brunelle. In 1976, Nutter became News Director at WCSH TV in Portland. At the time of the interview, he was still with WCSH as an Editorial Commentator.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: the history of broadcasting in Maine; late night talk shows in Portland; WCSH TV history; early television; the loss of video history with new technologies; Muskie's 1968 Convention speech; 102nd and 104th legislature commentary; Maine income tax; Emilien Levesque; Maine State House politics; Peter Kyros; the impact of the two-part budget; Muskie's relationship to Maine; Muskie's national contributions; political leaders today vs. Muskie's era; the Clinton scandal; and the personalities of Muskie and Coffin.

Indexed Names

Anderson, Jack, 1922-2005
Arnold, Lorin
Ayers, Normie
Baxter, Percival
Brackett, Norris
Brinkley, David
Brown, Marian Fuller
Brunelle, Jim
Byrne, John E. “Jeb”
Byrd, Robert
Chamberlain, Joshua Lawrence, 1828-1914
Childs, Dana
Clauson, Clinton Amos, 1895-1959
Clinton, Bill, 1946-
Coffin, Frank Morey
Cohen, William S.
Cote, Al
Crocker, Robert
Curtis, Kenneth M., 1931-
Damborg, Peter
Davis, Elise
Dufour, Arthur
Erwin, Jim
Fox, Scott
Hamlin, Hannibal, 1809-1891
Hathaway, Bill
Hildreth, Horace
Humphrey, Hubert H. (Hubert Horatio), 1911-1978
Jalbert, Louis
Johnson, Lyndon B. (Lyndon Baines), 1908-1973
Kennedy, John F. (John Fitzgerald), 1917-1963
Kyros, Peter N., Sr.
Lamb, Scott
Lausier, Louis “Papa”
Lee, Shep
Levesque, Emilien
Lund, John
Magnuson, Henry
Martin, John
Mitchell, George J. (George John), 1933-
Nutter, Fred
Pease, Harvey

Reed, John
Reynolds, Cliff
Richardson, Harrison
Rose, Bob
Schlick, Edward C.
Smith, Margaret Chase, 1897-1995
Sturtevant, Don
Valeriani, Richard
Ward, Kent

Transcript

Don Nicoll: We are on the fifth day of March, 1999 at the studios of WCSH TV in Portland, Channel 6, interviewing Fred Nutter. Fred, would you state your full name and your date of birth and your parents' name?

Fred Nutter: First name is Fred, middle initial is E, last name is Nutter. Born in Sanford, September 11, 1933, raised in Alfred. My father was Arthur Nutter, my mother was Betty, and I have a baby sister. When I grew up in Alfred, there were about a thousand people there. Nine hundred and ninety-nine were Republicans and we all knew who the Democrat in town was, and that's where I was trained. My first venture into politics I think was interviewing John Reed when he was governor, next to the hootchie-kootchie tent at the Acton Fairgrounds. I'll never forget it, never forget it. And I was scared to death because he was a governor and I didn't know too many of those types back in those days.

Following that I came in and went to work at, came in to Portland and went to work at WPOR, and followed Margaret Smith around in the fields of New Hampshire as she was trying to attract the votes for the, from her party for her party's presidential nomination way back then. And that's really what got me kind of interested in doing what I was doing. I got to know a lot of the players when I moved over to WCSH because I was city hall reporter, and from there, at that time we had beats and it fell upon me to replace Jim Brunelle up at the State House. So I became the third State House reporter we had, Henry Magnuson being the first one, Jim Brunelle and then me. And it was quite an honor to be up there, and, "Pad of paper for Henry?" And, I guess it was at that time, in order to learn more about politics, I started to hang around Joe Angelone's pizza shop a lot. And I got to know a few of the players and every once in a while got to be invited in to the back room. It was quite an honor.

DN: Now, when you started, you said you started in Sanford, was this for a radio station?

FN: Yup, yup, to help put on WSME, help put it on the air while I was going to college, and because I was basically the hometown, that's where I wanted to get started. And I married a girl from there so, that, we had known from high school days, so, that's where family was and that's where, back then we kind of stayed around where family was. Coming in to Portland was a big trip, and it was. Still is.

DN: Now, where did you go to college?

FN: Emerson College. Four years in the Navy after high school, during the Korean War, and then sailed around on an ammunition ship, and then came out of the service, bummed around for a while. Then decided to go to school, went out to Emerson College in Boston. And from there came up on weekends and that's where I used to help to put the radio station on the air in Sanford.

DN: Had you had an interest in radio before you went to Emerson?

FN: Yup, and it says so in my high school yearbook, one of the yearbooks. Back when I was a freshman, they used to put freshmen and your goal objectives, you know, those pictures and all of the, what you want to do. And alongside my freshman one, I had lost the picture but somebody brought it up to me after I got doing what I do now. And alongside the freshman picture is the words, "Want to work at WCSH Radio." When I was a kid, I used to come in to Portland on Friday afternoons and tiptoe in to the top of the Eastland where you could cross over, and I'd watch Normie Ayers play the piano because I liked his piano style. He, by the way, is Cliff Reynold's father-in-law, but I didn't know Cliff or, maybe that was even before they were married. And so I'd watch Normie, I liked his piano style. And then I'd go across the street to the Baxter Building and take my trumpet lessons. That was every Friday we used to do that. That was back when ladies walked Congress Street with gloves on and couldn't be seen smoking in public, by the way. So it was quite an event for the whole family to come down. And every Friday, that's what I did.

And so that's, I really kind of got enamored with broadcasting, and then had forgotten all about it until I was getting out of the Navy. We were out at Norfolk, on the way back from the Rock of Gibraltar, and I was on a destroyer at that moment. And an admiral on board was trying to talk to his wife. And he's one of these kind of guys who talks like he's got a mouth full of hot potatoes and marshmallows, right? I mean, awful. And he finally threw the microphone at me and he said, "Sailor, talk to my wife." "Aye, aye, sir." And I'm trying to figure out what he's trying to say because she wasn't getting anything out of it. And then I got encouragement from him after it was done, to get in to broadcasting. Well, I had this Maine accent and I love it. My hero as a kid growing up was Norris Brackett; he was a cow farmer. Really, I just thoroughly enjoyed that part of growing up. But I think that's what kind of led me in to it. I picked up a minor disability; spent a couple of weeks at Togus. They insisted you go through some testing as well as physical stuff. And all directions were to send me down to Emerson, so off I went.

DN: Now, when you came back and, to Sanford, and went in to the radio station, were you aiming for news work or were you aiming for disc jockey.

FN: No, I wanted to be a staff announcer. And I was a disc jockey down there. I was a little bit nervous about news people and all of that stuff that would . . . . Broadcast news then was basically rip and read. When somebody else was doing it, you didn't mind going to a town hall and getting a quote on a tape or some such thing, but to really get out and dig, nobody was doing that then. And television was just coming in on the scene. Well, when I came, finally came in to Portland at POR, we put on, I was doing the "Destination Dawn Show." That's midnight to six

a.m. for eighty-five bucks a week. And then decided we wanted to put on a talk show. Now, WPOR AM, (FM wasn't around, well, it wasn't very well established by that point) and so POR AM was two hundred and fifty watts at night time, a thousand day time. You could hardly get a signal past Cash Corner. Everybody, and I started doing a talk show.

And primarily our audience were people who worked at Nissen's. They worked at the Great A&P Stores, we had those around then, big warehouses here. So we had an audience at the warehouses and they'd call up. And it was primarily, in the beginning it was just an all-request show. And then from that we got in to something we called the Portland Sounding Board, which was a talk show, the beginning of the Larry King-type shows, right? I didn't know a damn thing what they were talking about, because I was commuting back and forth from Sanford then, and they were talking about things at city hall.

I couldn't reach South Portland with the signal, so I started coming in early anyway, and I started hanging around city hall. And I got to know Arthur Dufour who was the city clerk, got to know him very well. I wanted to know who the players were. And I got to know all of the department heads because at nighttime, I wanted to know, when people calling up and talking to me about these things, I wanted to know what the hell they were talking about. Number one, number two, you know, it's a, when you're a little anonymous you can gripe and complain, and I wanted to be able to set people straight if they were going down the wrong path, so that's what I did. And that's really, it was sort of a natural progression from there.

DN: Now, this is early sixties?

FN: Yeah, yeah, '62 when I came in to Portland.

DN: I assume your interview with John Reed by the hootchie-kootchie show was in the 1960 campaign.

FN: It would have been coming up to that, yeah.

DN: After he was elect-, after he succeeded Governor Clauson. And . . .

FN: But that son-of-a-gun, he also taught me a lot about politics. I bumped in to him years later; shook my hand, called me by name, asked about my wife and my three kids at that point. How would he remember them? He never met them. But he knew. Somebody was either behind his ear whispering things to him, but how would they know? You know, I mean, it was, just, the man had an incredible memory. I have a couple of images of him when, I happened to be working for POR when Lyndon Johnson came to Portland. We were ordered by then Governor Hildreth not to mention the fact Johnson was coming to town. President of the United States coming to Portland, Maine and we couldn't talk about it, under orders of the owner. Hmm, interesting. While they went right by the studio. The problem was, it was also ABC and it was Yankee Network, and so half the airwaves were taken up with this talk about Johnson 's New England trip anyway.

So, out at the airport, what do you see? Governor Reed coming down to welcome the President

to the State of Maine and then he, Reed, was going to fade into the background and go back to Augusta. Johnson would have no part of that, he grabbed him by the back of the neck, he dragged him up onto his car, and Reed rode right down to Monument Square, right down Congress Street with President Johnson. Quite a trip, quite an experience. Those things happened, see, and that was my first lesson in how nasty politics can be, too. We don't talk about that. Oh, come on. Shortly after that I left. Time to come over here.

DN: That's when you came to the CSH.

FN: Yup, yup.

DN: What, '64 or '65?

FN: I came here; I have it written down in my book so I don't remember, don't forget. Getting old. Eight-nineteen sixty-five, so August 19th of '65 when I came here.

DN: And your, when you came to CSH, it was in radio?

FN: Radio/TV, we had, it was half-and-half. For two years I worked for CSH radio, RDO radio out of Augusta, LBZ radio out of Bangor, CSH TV and WLBZ TV.

DN: How did you find the transition from, or bridging radio and television?

FN: Well, it wasn't all that difficult. It was scary. I mean, it was very intimidating. This is something I wanted to do, I had decided. But television was awfully new. Look, when I came here first, we were showing on the air on news films, films that we developed, we were literally showing the negative. Push a button to reverse the polarity, so black became white, white became black. The soundtrack was something that we had recorded inside the camera. If you developed the film to get a good picture, you usually lost the soundtrack, and the other way around. If you wanted to get a good soundtrack, then your picture was either over-exposed or under-exposed, or whatever. And then from there we changed over to positive film with a magnetic stripe, a piece of magnetic tape fused inside of the film, and that was dealing the same way we did with radio. You made your edit physically with a set of scissors or a sharp knife, stick them together with tape. And, yes, we used a lot of Scotch tape we weren't supposed to use, but that's what we used.

And that's how the TV things got on the air. But we were shooting and editing then based on radio for the sound bite. We weren't afraid of the talking heads. We were thankful for the talking heads. It's rare you could go get pictures of the actual event that people were talking about then. Today, the event leads but back then it was the other way around. At the same time, this television station was pioneering coverage of the Maine legislature, going back to the 102nd when Dana Childs was Speaker. And we put a camera in the corner of the, corner of the room over there. And I don't remember, it was, golly, it might have even been a little bit before that. Harvey Pease was around as clerk of the House and he pulled the plug on one of the debates that we were covering. I think this is back during Magnuson's time, one of the debates we were covering because he didn't like the tone of the debate.

Things have changed a lot since then. Now, everything is, we're, well, we're just changing formats again, we're going into digital. As you look around this office you see an awful lot of three-quarter inch tape, some two-inch. We don't have anything to play it back on any more. We're all down to little black boxes. Now what's going to happen? And you know the sad part about that, Don, is we've lost so much of our broadcast history with all of this, too, with this changing techniques, and . . .

DN: Is no one keeping equipment for playback on the old formats?

FN: Not on film any more. I think you can go up to Bangor and maybe get a film transferred over to videotape, into a format that will ultimately play out here. But that's very rapidly changing. When we changed from all film to videotape, most of that film went back through the processors again, so we could recover the silver, which is really what was the stock of the film. And that was back at the time when the Hunt brothers were going crazy, and the price of silver was like gold, or better than gold, and it was assignating out at ninety-nine point something percent pure. So that, you don't go to a grocery bag, but that's what we were doing, we'd develop the film, strip it, and there are maybe a few films from the early days, but not here.

DN: And none of that was transferred?

FN: Very little, very little.

DN: That's a real loss.

FN: I think so. And the other part of it is, I tell you one, you were talking about Muskie. I was up and recorded most, we had to change magazines, so during that changeover, Don Sturtevant was my photographer, (*unintelligible word*). . . . We lost a little piece of the changeover, when he was changing magazines over, but we came back and processed and ran the entire stuff unedited. That was the time that Bill Hathaway had taken Muskie on and the issue was Humphrey or Kennedy.

DN: Nineteen seventy-two, the state convention.

FN: Yup, and I got it all, and I was the only one there to get it all. I just, the night before at the party time, if you kept your ears open you knew something was building for the next morning, and I was determined I was going to be there. And we were there. God, by the time Muskie got done, there wasn't a dry eye in the place, including ours. Oh, he was magnificent.

DN: What do you remember about that speech? What was it that . . .?

FN: He talked about, what I personally remember about it is his talking about the awesome power of the Presidency of the United States of America. And just the way he said it, and how we should be sure as we go through this elections process. And he didn't want it to be rammed down anybody's throat, he wasn't pushing, publicly at least, anybody. He was pushing the convention to keep their options open, and he was the only one on the stage other than

Hathaway. When Hathaway stood up, everybody else on the stage left, except for Muskie with his hand in his face. And then when Hathaway got done, he stood up. And I remember his white knuckles; I remember his controlled anger, and he was a master at using that. We all know that, and he used that more beautifully than anybody.

We made copies of that and sent it to Humphrey. And I used to call Richard Valeriani, who was the NBC guy following Humphrey around then, and kept asking him how Muskie was doing in the presidential side, right. "He's not, he's not even on the long list, never mind the short list." And I'd call him maybe on a weekly basis. Finally Valeriani started calling me. He says, "What are you hearing?" I think I may have been talking to you, but what I was hearing was, he's in there.

DN: I misspoke, I said seventy-two, it's sixty-eight.

FN: Had to be, had to be '60s.

DN: Yeah, '68. And you, you followed that campaign up through the Chicago convention? Did CSH send anyone out there?

FN: No, we did not go that far. We covered New Hampshire, and that was it. Pity, but that's as far as we went.

DN: Was '68 your first real exposure to Ed Muskie?

FN: It probably was. I don't really remember. It would have, no, I knew him before then; I had to have known him before then. But he was a senator when I got to know him.

DN: Because you were, you started radio after he had gone to the senate.

FN: Yes, but I started, I started here in '65, so '66, '67, right in there when I, you know every time he came to town you'd bring him in. And if it wasn't you, it was Shepard that was bringing him in. Because I remember when he used to come in, they would come in and sit down and do some things with Phil Johnson occasionally, or with Larry or with Brunelle, which would be pieced out for the news. It was fifteen-minute newscasts we used to have then, too.

DN: Now when did you start covering the State House? You succeeded Jim Brunelle.

FN: I don't know if I have that down. I became news director in '76, so my guess is the State House probably '68, somewhere in there, couple or three years.

DN: So just about the time of the state convention and the big (*unintelligible phrase*) ...

FN: Yeah, I was doing all of that then.

DN: Did you manage to do any of the campaign itself after they nominated . . .?

FN: In New Hampshire.

DN: Just during the fall election, you covered New Hampshire?

FN: Yup, yup.

DN: And otherwise you were following it through NBC's national coverage, (*unintelligible word*) coverage.

FN: The network, yup.

DN: What was it . . .?

FN: Look, there were only eight of us in the news room then, counting sports and weather.

DN: In the days of covering . . .

FN: And the photographers.

DN: Ah, yes. In the days of covering the legislature, in that period '68 to the early '70s, what was the atmosphere like on the Republican and Democratic legislators?

FN: I can start you with the 102nd legislature, and the Democrats from my perspective were trying to prove that they could be leaders. Dana introduced business suits as opposed to long tails, as Speaker of the House. They were a little bit more informal, but they were still damn good business people, and that's, they had something to prove. Hundred and third legislature was one of revenge. The Republicans were back in control and they took every opportunity they had to rub some political noses in whatever mess they could make.

In the 104th legislature, and I'll never forget it, I think we were all hanging around Harry Richardson's office. He was the leader for the Republicans, and he said, "Follow me." There were two or three of us around. I think Kent Ward from *The Bangor Daily* was there as well as me, a couple of others. And we followed Harry and he went on down and he goes in to Emilien Levesque's office. Emilien was the Democrat minority leader. The paint was falling off the walls, the windows were loose, the water would pour in around them, and that's where the Republicans had put him. And Harry says, "Emilien, we're going to take care of this." And by God, by the end of the day the carpenters were on their way in. And he was reaching out to help them.

That was the legislature, 104th, that wrote the first major environmental legislation in this state, and they had received Muskie's message on the environment. That was the first legislature to seriously tackle the income tax. Guy by the name of Scott Lamb I think it was that wrote it. And a fellow by the name of Scott Fox later on that tried to get it repealed. Louis Jalbert stood up and said, "It'll be passed over my dead body." And it was, passed. State police were sent out to bring in Republicans that could not bring themselves to vote for income tax, in both the House and the Senate.

That was a, that was one hell of a legislature. They really, it, of all of those that I followed, I happen to think that's the one that did the premiere work because of what they did. They addressed the state's financial needs I think better than anybody else. And good old conservative Maine, they took the first real serious look at environmental issues and said, "We're going to change some of these things," and they did. And, it was Marian Fuller Brown, and what was the first issue she went after was billboards. And we became the first state in the union to chop down the billboards. It happened up on, it happened in Freeport, up on Route 295, or what is now 295.

DN: How much of that was the leadership of people like Harry Richardson, and how much of it was leadership from the governor; that was Ken Curtis' time?

FN: Ken had some serious problems with his, with the loss of his child, Susan, and people were sympathetic toward that. It was a whole totally different era than it is now. To be a liberal Democrat in those days was to be really something almost out of step with your own party. I have often said, I know more conservatives who are Democrats than I know conservatives who are Republicans. And that was a, it was kind of an interesting melting pot then. Emilien wanted to, because Curtis had asked for the income tax, Emilien insisted that he put the bill in the hopper with his name on it. He worked at that time as a machinist for Frazier Paper Company, I'll never forget it. And Frazier Paper told him if he put that bill in, they'd fire him. He did, and they did. And what has really impressed me over these years, yeah, I know Emilien got into trouble a couple of years ago; it was silly. Over the years, state government has taken care of this guy. They have provided, the governors over the years have made some appointments. The man has a lot of knowledge, a lot of talents, and his heart's in the right place, and that's what we're all about.

And I really learned a lot of respect for the political process then, when I saw them take care of both parties, somebody like Emilien. And, again, the man had the courage of his convictions, and he insisted that it go in. The bill had been written for Harry Richardson, and Harry wanted to put it in, but Emilien insisted because it was his governor's call. And if you go back then, if you go back to the middle of the session and caucuses, one by one you can see people like John Lund stand up and begin to support it; he was in the House then. Harry Richard-, not Harry Richardson, attorney general Jim Irwin, he was running dead hard against it, and he had a group of seventy, couldn't get to seventy-one, but he had a group of seventy that were dead set against that. I know, I broke a couple of stories on there. Nighttime meetings.

DN: You had the, you had time, or made time to do some intensive reporting, real reporting, not simply covering . . .

FN: Oh sure, look, you had a choice, Don, you had a choice back then. We could go up and do the story and send the film back on the Greyhound Bus, that's how we got it back here, and somebody'd develop it and you'd call down instructions for where you thought the best edit places were. And then you could go play cards with Ed Schlick in the afternoon, and Louis and a few of the other guys, or you could go back to the State House to hang around and learn.

I had arrived the same time John Martin did. John hung around the State House, he learned, he learned those rules better than anybody else, and he learned how to use them. And that's what made him effective, made him a Speaker for all those years. He knew the rules better than anybody else. It was, prior to that, is my understanding, it was outrageous to think that a legislator would take the time, never mind the media, to sit down and read the legislation they're going to be voting on. They'd look around and somebody'd tap them on the shoulder, thumbs up, thumbs down, that's how you did it. Well, that was a time where the transition took place, and the people that were sent to the legislature almost without exception started taking their job very seriously.

DN: Why do you think they did, that change took place?

FN: Because we were all changing, and the TV cameras were getting there. There were more of us up covering now than had ever been covering before. People like Doc Arnold would write his stuff for *The Bangor Daily*, Ken Ward would write for *The Bangor Daily*, and then started going down, attending some of the hearings and writing their own reports. And the interest had developed state-wide. And we had some damn good political leaders state-wide. The people like Ed Muskie, we had people like Margaret Smith, Bill Hathaway was bumming around, Ken Curtis was developing. I've often said I think Curtis' legacy to this state is to get us to stop thinking that the boundaries of the state hamper our abilities to expand. We were very parochial in our thought process. God, he had us talking about oil wells in the Gulf of Maine. I mean, he would look at the map of the continent and he'd say, we're not at the end of the line, we're right in the middle. And he got us to expand our thinking. And I think all of this just was a natural progression together.

DN: You mentioned some of the reporters, Doc Arnold, Ken Ward. What was Doc like, for example, as a reporter and as a . . .?

FN: Intimidating. I can't think of a better way to describe him. His cigars always stunk, but he always had one chomped into the corner of his mouth. And nothing really, he was the dean as one would expect the dean to be. And you didn't do anything up there without his knowledge or approval. That was it; he ran the State House. And those of us who didn't get the word before we went up there sure got it in a hurry after we got there. That changed. There was one point, UPI and AP would be side by side and there was, in the same office building, same office. And there was one point where they got up and drew a line down the middle of the floor, because they were always accusing the other guy of stealing the copy. And us TV folks would kind of wander in and occupy their space, and it was not too comfortable. Doc was not bashful about letting you know that you were treading on his territory, but that's the way it was.

DN: Bob Crocker was the AP?

FN: He was the AP guy.

DN: And was Jeb Byrne still there as UPI? Or had he left by then?

FN: I think he may have gone by then. It was before Bob Rose; I can't remember his name. I

can see his face but . . . .

DN: And was Pete Damborg still there?

FN: Oh, yeah, well, Pete was not, Pete was working for the Maine Employee's Association by that time and spent most of his time over there, but yeah. You know, that was back in the time also when the Augusta House was still open, and the booze would fly along pretty good. But again, it was during the conversion time, so.

DN: The, in that era, what was your impression of Ed Muskie? You saw him when he came in, and came in to the studios here . . . . ?

FN: In the beginning I was awestruck; I really was. I mean, the man would walk in and there was a presence about him that you couldn't help but say, "My God, I am in the land of a giant," before he seemed to get the national attention that he got. I remember a few things about Muskie. One, I love to eat steam clams, fried clams (the only one in my house that likes them) so we'd go up to the Yarmouth Clam Festival. And I would always get my clams and I would sit under a tree, and it would happen year after year after year, this long arm would reach over my shoulder, grab one of my damn clams, smile and suck it down. Jane would be about five trees away laughing like hell, for, "Get out of here!" So, I remember the playful side of him that way.

I remember covering a campaign, and I was lucky enough to be in the car with him. I think we were doing "A day in the life of a candidate." And George Mitchell was with him, and they were riding I forgot where, may have been up in Rumford, but I've forgotten where. But George was driving, Ed was in the front seat, Don Sturtevant and I were in the back seat. And Muskie noticed, as we were going through town, there were no Muskie bumper stickers visible anywhere, and he went ballistic. Now, whether or not he did that for us, to this day I don't know, but he went ballistic. And I can tell you, on the way out of town there were plenty of Muskie bumper stickers. Whatever event we went off to . . .

DN: How did George react?

FN: Very humble. He was, it was like, "Yes, sir," and, "I'll take right good care of that." And he did it because on the way out of town, the bumper stickers were prevalent. Somebody forgot to deliver them; obviously, they had been in town.

DN: Did you cover campaigns pretty intensively during the (*unintelligible phrase*) . . .?

FN: Yeah, we did. This television station always made an effort to go a lot more in-depth than just the surface stuff. I suppose today you would say what we did for the most part were puff pieces, but we were going to go out and try to do balanced reports on the kind of receptions they got. I'll tell you a better story about Peter Kyros, kind of illustrates this a little better. We had, in "A day in the life of a candidate," we'd followed Peter around. You do them actually, you did them stretched over about a week, and we followed Peter around. And he went into UNUM when they were downtown across from city hall, and he's up and down every row and he's patting people, and ladies that worked there, putting his arm around their shoulder, you know

Peter. And, always had an eye for the good-looking lady. Alice would be working the same row on the other side. Well, Alice stepped over; she jumped a row, and we saw it. Had it on film at one point. It was a lesson to learn. Peter has to go down this aisle that Alice had abandoned, and here sat the biggest, ugliest looking human being you've ever seen. If you were to draw a caricature, you'd draw the fumes rising from this stringy haired body, right? Peter took one look, he goes right over, puts his arm around her and says, "Alice, Alice, come over here and look at this, doesn't she type lovely." The man found something to say, positive. I learned a lot there, I really did.

Muskie did it much more subtly. Every time he'd walk around he'd do it. When he was nominated Vice President, we all go down, he's got his big, the big deal was down at the Kennebunk Golf Course in the golf house down there. I remember this big stuffed chair they stuck, wing-backed chair, in front of the door. On the other side of the door was a Secret Service type, and Don and I weren't too used to this Secret Service routine, right? And of course, coming off the Kennedy stuff, all of these people are still pretty up-tight. So, he spotted us, Muskie did, and we're chit-chatting away and whango, they get him off one side and they go over us. They cleaned inside our cameras, exposed film; they didn't care. They were nervous about something. And life changed after that. But up to that point, the access was there. Occasionally, he would pick up the phone or Jane would, but it wouldn't be uncommon for him to be on the other end and ask about employment for his kids for the summertime. And, he was a man, he was a father, he was a husband. And he didn't have a hell of a lot of money. I think most of us understood that. And he wouldn't be at all bashful about asking you to carry some stuff up the road if it was a little soft. Now, you can tell me better than I can remember, he owned a place, or had a place before Kennebunk. Where was it?

DN: In South China.

FN: Because I was up there a couple of times.

DN: He had, in 1954, he had a camp on China Lake on the east side of the lake, about, oh, about halfway down to the lake, and then he sold that and bought a camp at the southern end of the lake on a point of land. You got to it from Rte. 17, or Rte. 3, excuse me, and then they sold that and went to Kennebunk, and that was essentially because of his growing interest in golf. And the difficulty of really making use of the camp up at China.

FN: What I really remember is turning the water on and off. The damn pipes were, rubber pipes running on top of the ground. So that sort of made him like one of us. But he could put his weekend bummers on and still look like a senator. And he did. His carriage.

DN: What . . .?

FN: A lot of Republicans I know did not care for him.

DN: What were their objections to him?

FN: He was a Democrat.

DN: Now you've described yourself as a conservative. Did you . . .?

FN: Yup, I think he was.

DN: You looked on him as a conservative?

FN: It's my understanding, going back, as I'd studied state budgets over the years, that he introduced the part two budget, when he was governor. And I thought to myself, boy, that's the way to do it, that's the way it really ought to be done. You take care of keeping the store open stuff, that's a conservative approach. And then your new and expanded programs, you set them aside and you have your big political debates over those. If it's time to move to them, fine. Not these kind of games that they play up there now, where they try to slide things in through the back door or send them in via e-mail I guess; I don't know how they're doing a lot of the crap they do up there now. You know, we're doing things now that he wouldn't have dreamed of, and I don't think would have approved. I don't think he'd like the idea that the Democrats did last year, about having the budget go through on just a simple majority and then adjourning. That wasn't, I don't think that was the way. The man could certainly play politics better than most, but I don't think he'd have done that. I think it was an honorable profession with him. God, even John Martin didn't do that.

DN: Did you view yourself as a conservative in those days?

FN: No, no, no. Somebody would put a case together, I did a hour-long special, "Where do we go from here, in the 104th legislature?" And it was before passage of the income tax. But it, as I look back on it now, I was convinced that Maine needed an income tax. As I look back on it now, I say, "What a stupid thing I said." No, I really was in favor of it then. Excuse me. But I looked at the long list of state names as articulated by the super-sales people we have up there, and that's the political leadership. And when you see them agreeing on both sides, and the others are disagreeing because they're disagreeable, it's not a question of . . . . Louis, I thought, Jalbert, I thought, used to ask the right question which was, "That's nice, how are we going to pay for it?" And if you sit back and look at his constituency (and I got to know some of them over the years, some were interesting characters) you wondered how they were going to be able to pay for it. And I think that influenced me an awful lot in the way I tend to come down on things these days. You know, if you can put it into: "How many x-ray machines does a hospital need? How many horsepower do you really need under the hood of your car?" And if you're going to, if you're going to go for an eight horsepower, eight cylinders, why should the rest of us pay for that? Find another way, but don't charge me for it. Nothing wrong with that.

DN: You grew up in Alfred you said. Was your father in business, or . . .?

FN: My father, my father's uncle invented Palm Beach, the material. My father was a textile designer, and he invented what became known as the new Palm Beach during World War Two, which was non-scratchy. And he also invented Sunfrost and Springweave as fabrics for men's clothing. This is back in the days, well, primarily men's clothing, back in the days before the invention of or the use of the synthetic fibers; he hated synthetic fibers. And when the mills

went out in Sanford, the family fortune went out. But they were doing pretty up to those days. My grandfather was a wool sorter, my father's sister worked in the Burlington mending room, my father's uncle was a General Manager, one was a Vice President, and my father headed up the design section and, that's the way it was.

DN: So you grew up in a family that was associated with one of Maine's traditional industries?

FN: Yup, and I had the privilege of sitting in the back seat of the family car and going down to visit Mayor [Louis] Lausier on more than one occasion in Biddeford. Biddeford had, he had the only paved street in the town, or at least well-paved street.

DN: Did you have a sense of how Mayor Lausier operated in those days?

FN: Um-hem, but you could see it in town. Alfred had town meeting and as a small kid, all the boys had to carry the wood up to the fireplace; they met up on the second floor of the town hall, which also doubled as the gymnasium. One year somebody had discovered how much my father's property taxes were because he'd moved over to Alfred from Sanford, and they thought this was ridiculous. And he said, "Well, it is but I tried and they won't do anything to ease the taxes." "Well, that's easy enough, you just got to get the word out around town." "Now, how am I going to do that," said my father. "Well, you don't pay your taxes on time, you pay them a day late. You pay them a day late. It'll go on the town warrant, 'late taxes, Arthur Nutter,' whatever the figure was. And then it'll also say paid, because you'll get there before it goes to press." So my father tried that, and what I remember, again as a small boy, sitting up listening to some of that debate. "Mr. Moderator, Mr. Moderator, for what purpose is the gentleman, I'm looking here at Arthur Nutter's taxes, my God that's awful." And there was a discussion, a debate, and he got a tax reduction. Mr. Plumber, who lived three doors down, was the tax assessor, got the message. That's the way it worked.

DN: So you got an early education in politics.

FN: I went down to the town, yes, I did get an early education. I went down to the town to help them celebrate their bicentennial, couple of years ago now. And it was in the church and it was all prim and proper, and most of the people I know now are dead and gone, I knew then, dead and gone. But sure I'd go down, and I read my little piece. And I sat back down and this lady stands up, "Mr. Moderator, Mr. Modera- . . .

End of Side One
Side Two

FN: . . . Mr. Moderator, for what purpose does Miss Davis rise?" Somebody's whispering to me in my ear that she'd just come out of a nursing home. She'd understood I was going to be there; she was a hundred years old. She'd lived half the town's history. She was going to be there. So she stands up, got the walker and she's trembling. "Mr. Moderator, Mr. Moderator, for what purpose?" "Let me tall you about Freddy Nutter." Oh my God, I wanted to die a thousand deaths. But it's those little things that come back and they serve as trigger points, too. I didn't know she knew me from Adam. She certainly didn't know me from knee pads. She's a

spinster lady (*approx. 10 seconds blank tape.*)

. . . Think all of those things come back and, as they do come back, and thank God for the Elsie Davises of the world. They prompt your memory and there are some things we ought not forget. And it's all how it helps to mold us. Now, I have three children. Two of them are conservative, what I would call conservative. They'd call me flaming liberal by comparison. We just simply don't talk politics. I like to listen to Rush Limbaugh from time to time, but I think he's funny. He's entertaining, but I can't buy his philosophies. They do. That's scary.

DN: The third one?

FN: She plays politics when she wants to but she's not quite as far into it as the boys are.

DN: Are they all in Maine?

FN: Oh yes, I've been blessed. They're all right around this area and they all have good positions. Makes it nice.

DN: As you look back on Ed Muskie's career and his life related to Maine and also related to the national scene, first the question, what was your impression of his relationship to the state?

FN: He was Maine. Craggy, rocky, tough, very sympathetic. He was Maine; he looked like Maine. And he was, like most Maine folk, pretty sharp. I have a disappointment with Ed Muskie, and that was after he was Secretary of State, at the Sheraton Hotel out in South Portland, he'd decided to do us all the honor of doing a news conference. Of course, by that time he had this gaggle of national folk with him every time you turned around. And everything was off the record. And I couldn't see why it had to be off the record when all I really wanted to ask him was, did he like his job? He was new to being Secretary of State. And I was disappointed in that, that I thought he'd tell these guys to go ahead and roll it if you want, this is, you know, I didn't have any great secrets to the world that I was going to embarrass him with. That's, that was a trapping of the job. I think he kind of enjoyed it, and that disappointed me a bit.

DN: Did you feel that he'd changed over the years?

FN: Yup.

DN: In what ways?

FN: I think particularly when he ran for, his party's nomination and then lost that, that he was confused for a while. And I think that came across to those of us who had been watching him over the years. It's, the confidence factor wasn't there, it was boredom. Somebody from here, and I won't tell you who, but somebody from here bumped into David Brinkley in a hardware store in Washington, introduced himself. They'd known each other a bit. And they asked Brinkley what he thought of Ed Muskie. That's after all of this, but it hits that same time frame. Muskie at the time was just a senator; he hadn't made it up to Secretary of State yet. And Brinkley in his snide one-word answers said, "Wallpaper." And I think that answers your

question. By that, he meant just hanging around. He'd sort of lost his fiery purpose.

Look, look at what he did with the federal budget. I mean, he created that Budget Committee that ticked off half the rest of the people of his own party, but he found a way to flex his political muscles and to try to effect some change that way. And I think he did for a while. Then his not making it to the, his loss in New Hampshire (now you know and I know he won New Hampshire) but his loss in New Hampshire was, that the word that came out of you, the word that came out of him, although he didn't say it, he didn't do anything to dispute it, what he always said was one more vote than the next guy. But we're all looking at sixty percent or more. That was a number that came from God knows where, but none of you people with him, including himself, did anything to dispute that.

So there was an over-confidence factor. And then afterwards we understand about the [Donald] Segretti trickies and all of that kind of stuff. We lost a good opportunity to have a good President. He started acting presidential before he made it. I don't think he really lost touch with the common people; I'm not convinced he cried over there. I, maybe I'm one of the few, but standing in the crowd, I thought it was a flake of snow.

DN: You're right. I was very close to the platform.

FN: But again, I'd seen his controlled anger stuff before, too, at that point, and I thought it was part of the act. I give the man more credit than standing in front of an empty building and going through this charade.

When I get too conservative, you look right over there on that shelf, second tape in, LBJ. That was Johnson's State of the Union Address where he declared war on poverty, and I break that out and play it every once in a while. It's a beautiful speech; it really was, got some good ideals in there.

DN: As you think about the, Ed's public life, what were his major contributions, first at the state level, that you observed, and then what were his major contributions in the national sense?

FN: Well I think, from, I'm going to answer it several ways, I think. The first contribution probably was, that still impacts on us today, was his, his creation as I mentioned earlier of the part one and part two budget, capital expansion kind of stuff. I thought that was a, just a brilliant way to do it. I think his major contribution to the state was the creation of a second political party. We didn't have very much. Frank Coffin sure as hell wasn't doing much of it all by himself. Tried, but needed a little help and Muskie seemed to have the personality to be able to do it.

On the national scene, I don't know, Muskie also brought us an awful lot of honor, I guess you have to say that on a nation-wide basis. We seem to be fortunate that we've sent some very good people to Washington. Nation-wide, certainly his raising the public conscious as it relates to the environmental issues. I'm not sure "Mr. Clean" is what you really want to be all the time, but nobody was arguing for that before and somebody has to if you're going to have a good debate. And he articulated that side I thought exceptionally well.

And he gave it some prominence that it, that whole genre of political experience these days simply didn't have any single, what do I want to say? We had the radical approach to an awful lot of problems, and so you look at somebody who's a strong advocate and say, "But they're a radical; they're off the deep end." And you simply kiss it off, you don't pay attention to it. He forced us to pay attention, and his ability to strike a compromise, one step leading to the next, leading to the next, you'd probably be, a good carpenter might be a way to describe him. He was a good builder. Because he would build upon those basic tenets that he'd set out before, and he knew where he wanted to go, and he seemed to have a sense about, he knew how to get there.

Maybe that comes with time, of serving in the Senate, by osmosis. I don't think so. I think it's because of the talents he had, and certainly the people he chose to surround himself with. I'm not saying that because you're here, but I was always impressed with the crowd that he had as part of his inside circle around here. And he never seemed to lose touch with them. I think most of his major decisions were probably made after having some input from them. Do you remember the speech he gave, oh, was over to Pachios' place in Cape Elizabeth, nation-wide address?

DN: Yes, 1970.

FN: Whew, boy, that was a barn-burner, too. That's what prompted I think probably his nation-wide attention. But I've got to tell you what prompted Hubert Humphrey's attention was that speech he gave up in Waterville; we made a copy. Valeriani, if he's still around, would testify to that, I'm sure. God, that was a good speech.

DN: Why do you think Maine has, over the years, sent so many distinguished people to the Capitol?

FN: That's a very good question. Some of those have not been terribly distinguished, as you well know. As a kid, again, growing up where I grew up, frequently you'd hear the older folks saying, "Well, they voted for so and so to get them the hell out of town." you know. Oops. That's not really the way you want to build your political base, but, and maybe that's the way it was back then. I don't know. We've had our share, certainly, of political giants that have gone along, Ed Muskie being one of them. But go back and look at Reed, Hamlin, Chamberlain, I mean, it's not just this generation and this time period. I don't know why it is. I worry about it because I don't think that the generation coming along today spends any time and has any interest in their political world, you know. A lot of folks, in the winter-time, that's what you did. It was, that was your winter entertainment.

DN: But what has changed it? Why aren't young people interested?

FN: I think the Kennedy assassination, I think the distrust that rose out of the Vietnam War impacted on several generations of people. The loss of patriotism I think around the country, certainly more than just here, have all had an impact on that, on the change of attitudes. And God knows what we've been through now with the second impeachment in the country's history, which frankly outrages me, to see that it turned out to be politics as usual as to how we address

that issue. Where's the censure they were all talking about? Didn't happen yet, ain't gonna happen. We all know it. Two consenting adults, fine, but you don't lie about it before a federal grand jury, and I think people have lost their focus on their part. The White House spin masters were really good. But if you look at the spin people during the Nixon era, and you look at the spin people now during the Clinton era, and I think all of this is just played into this hand of, "I don't want to get contaminated by these guys. I'm just going to go on, as long as things are good, as long as the economy is good." I think we've seen that in Maine, there's no need to change anything. But the distrust factor has led to the disinterest factor.

DN: Do you think that the political leaders in those days were a more moral, higher standards than today?

FN: No, no, I don't. Absolutely not. Their escapades were either kept private or kept out of the media anyway. When, when some of the Clinton papers were forwarded to the Congress by the special prosecutor, the Lewinsky interview for example, and I remember watching the network people and how they were addressing the issues. They were coming up against words that they would never use in their broadcasts and that would never be seen in a family daily newspaper, and they're all struggling with this competitive pressure. And I remember two of them, Schaefer of CBS for one, who said, "I can't read this and I won't." And he found another way to convey the message, while we used to convey messages.

You know, around here, in my life time, the one that has seemed to break, break in to the scandal side of the business from time to time would be Peter Kyros. And there was a head muckraker out of New York, out of Washington that would uncover his name for some of Peter's escapades.

DN: Is this Jack Anderson?

FN: Anderson I'm talking about, yeah. The, but that stuff was very rare. We would talk about these things from time to time. You'd see people off on a, other politicians, male and female, off on a little toot, party time. Hey, the Democrats knew how to run a convention better than anybody in this world. I mean, they did their business and then they knew how to party, and then they'd do their business some more. But the party time was, the cameras were away, the reporters put their papers away, and they either decided they were just going to be one of the people, or they'd stay away from the event and it didn't get reported. I think there was a general awareness, but no need to get caught up in it. It wasn't flouted. And I think if, of the scandals that I can recall, if somebody got their hand caught in the cookie jar somewhere, they ultimately 'fessed up to it. None of this wagging of fingers and "I didn't do it." I think that kind of stuff discredits the institution, and tarnishes an awful lot of good people along the road. It's a damn shame but that's life today. It'll change.

DN: How do you think it'll change?

FN: We'll have another crisis of some kind, and other leaders will step forward and they'll shine like we've never seen them shine before. We have seen, I think, a number of people in both political parties in Washington at least, that came very close to shining. They didn't have

to, so they didn't. But they were exercising some, I think, extraordinary leadership positions on both sides of the aisle and kept our government from collapsing. I think we came damn close to collapse, myself, I think that.

They had some outstanding people in the Cabinet, you had some outstanding people up and down the board that have just, in both houses of the Congress, that I think are doing marvelous jobs. I tell you, I had never been a great fan of Robert Byrd, primarily because I think he steals away a lot of money that ought to come to us in Maine. But face it, the man's very effective. God, he gave a couple of speeches during this last mess that we just went through the likes of which, if you could sit back and really listen to them, they were beautiful, the sense of history, the sense of, where they're all coming from. His conclusion was wrong, but his sense of, as a conservative. . . . The sense of, his sense of historic importance, I thought, were right on the money.

DN: How do you think Ed Muskie would have reacted to all of this?

FN: Well, if he had been Secretary of State, he might have taken the same route that Bill Cohen took and just kind of keep your hands as far away from it as possible. If he was in a leadership position in the Senate, he might have taken Byrd's approach, chastise him, probably behind his back call him stupid for getting caught, might even say that publicly. I'm not sure but what he might have sat back and said, "ell, for the next two years there won't be anything out of us for the state of Maine, because I can't sit in the same room with him." I really don't know. I don't think he'd tolerate it, to be perfectly honest.

DN: As you look back at Ed Muskie's career, are there any vivid memories you have that we haven't mentioned?

FN: By God, if there are I'll let you know, Don. No, I'm just, I personally, well, I stood up in the Eastland with him one night. There were a few people in the room; you might have been in there, in that suite of rooms overlooking Back Cove. And he looked down and everybody'd be talking about these little political incidental little things, and he was taking the big picture. And he was looking at Back Cove saying, "Oh, some day we've got to develop this." And he was talking about ideas that Governor Baxter had talked about, and Baxter's brother had talked, the mayor had talked about, about turning this into, into a marina down there and that kind of stuff. And it was, it was just marvelous to sit back and hear him go. I guess I'm kind of a romantic and I like people to dream a little bit, and I can kind of catch on to part of that dream, and I think he did that.

He was a good salesman, get you to buy his ideas, and unless you hated him because he was a Democrat, as long as you could beyond that, he was okay. I think that's why he attracted so many Republicans to his side, at least to his election. I'm trying to remember some of his opponents. . . . And you just look at him, and he had some folks that had the ability, had the money, up against him, but they sure didn't command the presence that he did. I had trouble getting ready for one debate; I think it was the Monks debate. I had trouble saying the word Edmund; my tongue would always get caught around my teeth. And he finally looks at me, he says, "Why don't you just call me Ed?" He knew, I mean, you know, this was kind of early on

in my career, but he knew that I was concentrating on what the questions were going to be. I was a little bit inspired by him, awestruck. And I didn't have much to say about his opponent at that point, didn't particularly care for him. And he knew how to set me at ease so I could concentrate on my job. He did that, he knew. He knew if I concentrated on my job, he was going to come out okay, if I didn't concentrate on my job, I might screw him up.

He's the kind of a person you would trust, was the kind of a person, you would trust to babysit your children. I don't know about you, but in my household, we only had one babysitter once with three kids, because they were about the most precious things you could ever have. And I would have trusted him to babysit my kids. And I don't say that about too many other people, including relatives. What are your thoughts of Ed Muskie?

DN: Ah, well, I would agree with your characterization of him. He was essentially an imaginative and compassionate individual, and someone who cared very deeply about the values of the state in which he grew up. And not only the societal values, but the physical values of the state. And his focus as a political leader was on finding the most practical ways of implementing those values and ideas and persuading people . . .

FN: Master at that.

DN: . . . to join together. And in that sense, I think he was a conservative.

FN: But you know, that's why he was so good on TV, too. I've been convinced since I got into this business that if you're going to bullshit people, make sure there's not a TV camera around. Because it looks right into your soul and people can detect it just as fast as they can snap a finger. And he could look at that camera and you'd never find it with that.

DN: He had two almost incredible qualities when it came to television. One was that genuineness, and the other was his sense of timing.

FN: Oh, he was good at that.

DN: When he was on the stump, he could sometimes go on and on and on, but when he was on television, remarkably, from the very first program, he had this sense of timing. So that at the end of your time, he ended with just the message that he wanted to get across, on the second. And he ended the sentence on the second.

FN: I would ask, he'd ask us, "How much do you want?" We'd have a question, "How much do you want?" Oh, I need about a minute and a half. You're exactly right; a minute and twenty-nine seconds, and that would be it. It would give us a little time for a smile at the end. I'm also convinced he knew our business better than we did, because if you didn't want to answer a question, he'd go into a very lengthy explanation. And at the time, we're all busy changing our magazines, reloading, that's where we got the answer, that was it, out of the room and gone.

DN: He was a remarkable man. And, well I had the great good fortune to work for two extraordinary people, Frank Coffin and then Ed.

FN: I guess I'd forgotten you worked for Coffin.

DN: Yup.

FN: Did I say anything, I mentioned his name?

DN: You were referring . . .

FN: Coffin was, I always liked Frank Coffin but I thought he was a cold fish. There was no personality there that came out. You couldn't warm up to the guy.

DN: That's intriguing. He's one of the warmest people.

FN: I know he is, but you couldn't do it. By the same token, I'm talking about the way he came over on camera. He came over cold, and Ed came over like your next-door neighbor, warm.

DN: Well that's another . . .

FN: Cosmetic thing, but it's true.

DN: It's one of those indefinable things about television. You can have two people, both of them are very genuine, and one like Ed Muskie comes through loud and clear, and the other like Frank somehow doesn't come across in the same way that he will in person.

FN: I describe Frank as being a little bit too cerebral, if you understand what I'm saying when I say that?

DN: Yeah.

FN: And he, he didn't have really the common touch. I mean, you can't help but be impressed with the man's credentials and with his brilliance, but it's hard to relate to.

DN: Well that, that's fascinating because when you look back, not only at Frank as I've known him, working with him, for him, but also you look at his relationship with the people in his community in Lewiston. Frank was elected to the state committee in 1954 because Albert Cote . . .

FN: I knew Al Cote.

DN: . . . who was slated to get that seat on the state committee cheerfully stepped aside so his high school classmate and friend, Frank Coffin, could go on the state committee. And Frank's relationship with the Franco-American community, even though he came from a Protestant Yankee family, was very warm. And he was not regarded as stand-offish or cold or looking down on, and yet for you as a reporter, that didn't come across. And that was his . . .

FN: Nope. As I got to know him over the years, I realized that it was probably a wrong lasting impression, but it certainly was the first.

DN: And that was his major problem in the 1960 campaign with John Reed, although his downfall in that election really was the anti-Kennedy vote in Maine. Because Frank lost by about twenty thousand and Kennedy lost the state by sixty. As he said to Frank after the election, "I'm sorry Frank; my coattails dragged you down." Well, Fred, thank you very much, this has been very helpful.

FN: Well, I hope we pulled some of it out for you. Anything to use in that.

End of Interview