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## Plante, Jerry oral history interview

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## **Interview with Jerry Plante by Mike Richard**

*Summary Sheet and Transcript*

### **Interviewee**

Plante, Jerry

### **Interviewer**

Richard, Mike

### **Date**

July 8, 1999

### **Place**

Saco, Maine

### **ID Number**

MOH 116

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### **Biographical Note**

Jerry Plante was born on January 8, 1945 in Waterville, Maine. He was a schoolteacher until he became a Clerk of the Maine House of Representatives. He was class president, captain of the football team, president of the debating club, and governor of Boys' State (and through this represented Maine and met President Eisenhower at the age of 18) in high school. He met Muskie in 1954 and was a member of the Maine House of Representatives from 1957-1965, met his wife in high school (married 1961), and had four children (Scott, Andrea, Lisa, and Dean). Jerry graduated from the University of Maine at Orono in 1965, and taught at Biddeford High School. He worked as an aide to Peter N. Kyros, Sr. for eight years from 1968-1975. He became town manager of Old Orchard Beach in 1975 and served in that capacity for 15 years. In 1990, he became an insurance agent with Met Life. He is president of the local chapter of the AARP in Saco, Maine, and chairman of Saco Bay Planning Commission.

### **Scope and Content Note**

Interview includes discussions of: political, cultural, and economic dynamics of Old Orchard Beach, Maine; Office of Price Stabilization (OPS); first encounter with and impressions of

Muskie; 1960 presidential election; Public Utilities Commission (PUC); Archives bill; Hildreth-Clauson debate; being a congressional aide to Peter N. Kyros, Sr.; Anderson bill; value of political contacts; AARP; and the Saco Bay Planning Commission.

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## **Transcript**

**Mike Richard:** The date is July 8th, 1999, we're at the home of Jerry Plante in Saco, Maine. The time is about 10:30. This is Mike Richard. And Mr. Plante, could you give me your full name and spell it, please?

**Jerry Plante:** My name is Jerome G. Plante, Plante- P-L-A-N-T-E. And we're in fact in Old Orchard Beach, which (*unintelligible word*) Saco, Maine.

**MR:** Oh yes; I'm sorry. And when was your date of birth?

**JP:** I was born January 8th, 1935, ironically the same day Elvis Presley was born. All of his fans remind me of this when they hear my date of birth.

**MR:** And what was your home town?

**JP:** I was born in Waterville, Maine, but I've lived in Old Orchard Beach since 1945, so this is pretty much my hometown.

**MR:** Do you have many memories of your time in Waterville?

**JP:** Some. It was more or less like a Huck Sawyer, Finn, you know, Sawyer type thing, because we lived near Messalonskee Stream. My dad had died in 1943 when we were at Biddeford, Maine, and my mother moved to Waterville. So we lived with my grandparents, Ernest, Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Gadbois, G-A-D-B-O-I-S. And we lived there for two years until my mother remarried, and that's how we ended up moving back to Old Orchard Beach. My stepfather was a concessionaire here in Old Orchard Beach.

**MR:** Okay. I'll ask you a little bit more about your family life. Did you have any siblings?

**JP:** Yes, I'm the third, the third child. My sister Patricia Plante ultimately became president of the University of Southern Maine. My brother Mark E. Plante was a superintendent of schools, retired as such, now living here in Old Orchard Beach, which my mother, who is still eighty-

seven years of age. And myself, I'm the third one, and my kid brother Dick who became a school teacher, mostly in the Kittery system, and retired from there also. At one time we were all teachers. I left the teaching profession to become clerk of the Maine House of Representatives after the 1964 Johnson-Goldwater debacle.

So all of us did quite well, although my mother was a widow for a while. My mother strongly believed in good education background and we all realized at the time it was one way of rescuing ourselves from poverty, so that's why we worked so hard. And we did work very, very hard. In fact, my sister, who I said became ultimately president of the University of Southern Maine, was a chambermaid here in Old Orchard Beach at thirteen years of age at the small hotel called the Tidewater Hotel. And so all of us here in Old Orchard had great opportunities, because we could work the better jobs, and we could work two or three jobs if we were willing to do so or capable of doing so. And that was the case in most instances, so we could save money for college. Of course, the cost of college when I went was twelve hundred dollars for room and board and pizza money as well, so it's quite different today.

**MR:** And what were your parents', or what were your mother's political beliefs?

**JP:** My mother was not active politically. My dad died of cirrhosis of the liver in 1943. He was only thirty-three years of age. And his parents' political activities were very limited. In fact, I can remember my grandmother, Rose Plante, (my father was an only son), fearing that, you know, I may be hurt if I get into politics because of my Franco American background. But, you know, being young and eager, I ignored that advice, and I'm kind of glad I did so. She meant it to be kind to me, but at the same time I'm glad I resented her advice.

**MR:** What was the political registration of your elders in your family? Or were they registered?

**JP:** They were registered voters. My stepfather enrolled as a Republican because Old Orchard Beach was highly Republican at the time, and the town clerk, Fred Luce at the time, would just automatically assume if you had a business you were Republican. My mother I think was unenrolled. So there was no political advantage as far as my family was concerned. But I can remember when I was very young, Mrs. Bill next door to us- we lived in a duplex on Wescott Street along the railroad tracks, it's still called the other side of the tracks, you know. And I can remember hitting on the water pipes and saying in French, "He's on," referring to FDR. And we would go into their living room, which was covered with sheets. All of the couches were protected in those days; they valued the expenses of furniture I suppose. And we quietly would listen to FDR giving one of his infamous fireside chats. So I might have been subconsciously influenced by FDR, because at that time he was one of my heroes, as well of course as Ted Williams, Joe DiMaggio and Joe Lewis.

**MR:** Were your siblings as interested in politics at that point as you were?

**JP:** No, no. They were not. I think that the spark probably came because I was, you know, in the minority as far as ethnic groups here in Old Orchard Beach is concerned. There weren't as

many so-called Franco-Americans as there are today. But my peers in high school always encouraged me to run for different things and I didn't need much encouragement, in all honesty. The phrase in my yearbook I was looking at a few years ago said, "Fame is the thirst of youth," quote, unquote. And so I must have been eager to seek these positions.

I was class president of the class of '54, I was captain of my football team (in those days the team elected you), I was president of the debating club again as the result of an election, so my, my peers had accepted me. Plus (*unintelligible word*) Post, American Legion, had picked me to go to Boys State, the American Legion Dirigo Boys State in 1953, and I was elected governor of Boys State and went down to represent Maine with another young lad in 1953, and that's when I met President Eisenhower, had my photo taken with President Eisenhower. It was the first significant politician that I had my photo taken with. I have it somewhere around the house here. It's ironic, at the time I had, even at that age, I was only eighteen, but I had Democratic leanings. I met John Foster Dulles who was Secretary of State. Eugene, not Eugene McCarthy, but Joseph McCarthy was quite infamous at the time, and he was kind of a darling of the American Legion. So he addressed the Boys Nation in Washington, D.C., so I heard Joe McCarthy. This was before the Army McCarthy hearings and his downfall, and Margaret Chase Smith's "declaration of conscience," so-called.

So, and I had my picture taken with Vice President Richard Nixon who was around the vice presidential seal. And he pointed out that the major difference between that seal and the presidential seal was that the presidential seal at the time had forty-eight stars because then we only had forty-eight states, and the vice presidential seal had thirteen stars for the original states that formed the United States of America, and I can remember him pointing that out to me. Robert Hale was a Republican and a member of Congress at the time, was in the picture, and also Frederick G. Payne who had been governor of Maine, who Ed Muskie ultimately defeated in '58, and so all my association at that point had been with Republicans. In fact, when I was governor or Boys State, I met Burton Cross, who Ed Muskie was to defeat subsequently. And I had a string bow tie at the time, and he had a very expensive silk tie with some green and white hounds tooth. So I suggested to him that we ought to swap ties, and we did so. And I put his fancy silk tie on, he put my string bow tie on, and it made all the major newspapers in the state of Maine. So I had a taste for promotions at that time, I think.

**MR:** Now, going back a bit, what were your, did your stepfather have any political involvement or (*unintelligible word*)?

**JP:** No, my stepfather had been a dropout, probably in the fourth or fifth grade, and he had a language barrier; very little formal education. All my stepfather ever knew was hard work. My mother worked in department stores, Nichols Department Store in Biddeford and Butler's Department Store for years. Later she operated for a family at a foundation shop in Biddeford. But all her life she wore cardboards in her shoes and walked the floors of department stores; worked very, very hard all her life. In fact, when she got her first Social Security check, it was about seventy-six dollars or seventy-eight dollars in 1967, and I've always promoted Social Security and the cost of living adjustment. I'm glad I did. Now today she's independent,

because her check is up to about four hundred and seventy, four hundred, a little over five hundred probably with the Medicare deduction. So it goes to prove that without COLA, she'd have difficulties being independent- owning her own house at eighty-seven years of age and having no mortgage, paying all her taxes. And although she would qualify for, even for food stamps and fuel adjustment and tax rebates, she's chosen not to do so. She thinks others need it more.

**MR:** And what were your parents' religious beliefs?

**JP:** They were Roman Catholic, which was really traditional of course. There are very few French Huguenots in this area. And they were active Catholics.

**MR:** Would you describe yourself the same way, or similar?

**JP:** I'm an active Catholic, but I don't think I was as active as my grandparents or parents.

**MR:** And did you attend the public school system in Old Orchard, or Waterville and then Old Orchard?

**JP:** When I, we lived for a brief period until my father died in Biddeford. I attended sub-primary. They didn't have, it was a public sub-primary, Bradbury Street School. I had two teachers named O'Sullivan. And then I went to St. Joseph's for a year or two, which is a parochial school in Biddeford. Then my dad died in, I think in 1943, we moved to Waterville. And in Waterville I attended parochial school called St. Francis de Sel. Made some friends even to this day, Marc and Guy Viguex. And one of them was a legislator recently from Winslow. And I was there a couple years until my mother remarried and moved here to Old Orchard Beach in '45.

So I'd had, until '45, other than sub-primary, principally a parochial school background, and much of the instruction was in French. So here, when I came here in the fifth grade, my English was not up to par. So I had a teacher named Mrs. Grant who was very kind to me. She'd let me, on Saturday mornings I'd hitchhike to Saco. She lived there in an apartment, lived there with her daughter, and she would teach me English from the Jack and Jane books and those likes, and . . . I took a liking to the English language and became very proficient at it. In fact, my sister's doctorate degree was not in administration, although she was a college administrator, but it was English, she was, so. We knew we had to compete with those who mastered the King's English, so we had to do well as well.

**MR:** Now, you mentioned earlier that the French population was a rather small minority in the Old Orchard area?

**JP:** Yes. Old Orchard Beach had never had a Democrat in the state legislature until I ran in '56, from 1883. Much of that didn't have to do just with the fact that the Franco American population was small. The Irish Americans who came here first were kind of split. Many of the

Irish Americans in this area, because you know, they would be willing to settle for something, were Republicans. And of course some of them were Democrats as well, but they were in the minority. They had (*unintelligible word*) the district, as well, not just here but throughout the state. The legislative district in the early fifties here comprised of the town of York, which is not contiguous to Old Orchard Beach at all, and North Kennebunkport which is now Arundel, and Old Orchard Beach. None of the towns were contiguous. Later on I changed that. When [John H.] Reed was governor I made a deal with him on the sales tax. We'll probably get to that later, how I changed that reapportionment formula. Then they dropped the town of York because Old Orchard's population was increasing and as a result of some reapportionment. And they just had North Kennebunkport, which is now Arundel, a name which I had changed when I had represented North Kennebunkport and Old Orchard Beach. So it gave me a better chance in 1956 when they dropped York down, and I won with fifty-four percent of the votes. Of course it didn't hurt having Ed Muskie at the top of the ticket for reelection in 1954.

**MR:** Okay, well I guess, let's return to your political involvement, in '54 I believe we left off, after you were governor of the Boys' State in Maine.

**JP:** In '54, '56 was the first time I ran with Muskie's reelection. In '54 I was active in Muskie's reelection campaign. My interest grew particularly because we had a person who was friendly with Ed Muskie named David K. Marshall, who was running for judge of probate, and Ralph Ross from Sanford, clerk of courts. In those days Democrats didn't expect to get elected to the county offices, so they flipped a coin who would run for clerk of the house, clerk of the courts, rather, not clerk of the house, and judge of probate. And that's why those two ran for those positions. David K. Marshall had been on the OPS, Office of Price Stabilization, with Ed Muskie. In fact I found later that many of the people associated, that was one of the few areas of patronage from Maine was the OPS, and many of those people that associated with Ed Muskie came from that OPS office, and many of them are attorneys.

And so it was because of my friendship with David K. Marshall, I got to meet Ed Muskie. And of course the influence I had at Boys' State, Gerald Grady was a Democrat and he was a director at Boys' State. And later, when I attended University of Maine in Orono, I had such teachers as Bud Schoenberger, an active, who recently passed away, excellent professor of history. And his influence, Bud Schoenberger, and another instructor named Herb Bass, and the like kind of reinforced some of my beliefs.

So it was easy for me to get some good ideas by having those people as instructors. Like, I introduced the first bill to develop the Bureau of Maine Archives. Well, that wasn't one of my original ideas. I had heard what archives were when I was studying history at the University of Maine in Orono. Until that time, like many people, I thought archives might have been something you put in a salad. So I introduced that bill, and I was a minority member at the time, so the committee changed the, came out with a committee bill and changed the sponsorship. In those days they didn't like Democrat names on bills that became law. So today, you go to Augusta and you see the Bureau of Maine Archives and it started from that one kernel that I had, the question that we get a professional archivist in the state of Maine.



**MR:** Now you were in the Maine house for, from 1956 until 1964 was it, or '62?

**JP:** Yeah, '56 to '64, as far as the elections are concerned. Fifty-seven to '65, you know, as far as the two years elec-, because they, you're elected on the even-numbered years and you served two years on the odd-numbered years. So in '64 I'd chosen not to run after four terms. I was one of the original four-term guys, I guess. But it wasn't because of, term limits were not even thought of in those days. I just thought, I'd just gotten married and we had adopted a little boy, Scott, and my wife was pregnant with Andrea three months after we adopted Scott, so my family was growing. And I'd gone to college every other year taking the eight years, because I served in the legislature. We had biannual sessions at that time, so it was very convenient. So I kept gauging what would work and wouldn't work because of the, I was a government and economics major, and so it was good training. Like Northeast College today has internships, it's part of your training? I had that going long before that became normal for some colleges. I'd go in the legislature one year, go to college, go to the legislature, go to college. And during the summer months and during the off year I would work to save money for college.

**MR:** So by 1965 you'd graduated from UMO?

**JP:** Yes I had, and at that time I was teaching at Biddeford High School. I had been a February graduate. And so, after the '64 debacle when Johnson just carried Maine and Muskie was reelected, that didn't hurt of course, having Muskie and Johnson at the top of the ticket. I had chosen not to run and for the first time since the Depression the Democrats took both the House and Senate. So I ran for clerk of the House, Democratic caucus endorsed me, and I became the first one since the Depression. Ironically, the secretary of the Senate was Ed Pert, who later became a member of the, clerk of the House for a good period of time.

**MR:** Now, you mentioned you met your wife in this period while you were in the House, or later on when you were in the House and. . . .

**JP:** Oh, long before that. We were high school sweethearts, yeah. She was a freshman and I was a junior in high school when we started dating. So, I'd, she had initially lived in Bath, moved to Ocean Park. And so, we were high school sweethearts.

**MR:** And, you mentioned you first met Muskie in '54, and what were your first impressions of him in that meeting?

**JP:** He looked pretty tough to me. First of all his height was very impressive. He had tremendous command of the English language. I appreciated his debating skills, and I'd heard about his temper. There were a few times when he and I didn't see eye-to-eye anyway. First of all, he was sort of a hero. And instances where we disagreed were very remote.

**MR:** What, would you care to share some of these instances?

**JP:** In 1960, it wasn't a real disagreement, but in 1960 people such as Harry Truman didn't want Jack Kennedy to become president. And so there was some reluctance on the part of some Maine Democrats. I was an assistant minority floor leader at the time, and I wanted to support Jack Kennedy, and eventually got on board either in '58 or '59. And at that time some Maine Republicans were, Maine Democrats rather, were hesitant about backing Jack Kennedy, because there was an effort by Truman and others, and Truman still had a, some political weight at that time, to support Stuart Symington, who was a U.S. senator from Missouri, who had been Secretary of the Air Force, to become the Democratic nominee in 1960, so that, this agitation took place in '58 and '59.

So the Democrats were elected to Maine because the political wisdom at the time was that if Jack Kennedy, a renowned Catholic, were denied the nomination, to appease the Catholics the most prominent Catholic in the U.S. Senate, or one of them, was Ed Muskie. And the idea was that you might end up with a Stuart-Muskie ticket. This was 1959-60. And so I went against that wisdom by going on board with the Kennedy campaign. But no one in Muskie's camp or Ed himself ever suggested that I ought not to do so, and of course he and people around him became strong supporters of Jack Kennedy ultimately, because Stuart Symington's campaign never got off the ground.

I also made a seven hundred dollar bet with a guy named Plato Truman, who has a habit of running as a Republican and independent, a Democrat. And at the time he was selling food products down at Old Orchard Beach. And I met him in front of Bill's Pizza, and he was telling me how Kennedy was going to lose to Johnson in the convention. I couldn't afford to go to the convention even if I'd wanted to be a delegate. But I, he and I made a seven hundred dollar bet that, I bet that Kennedy was going to get the nomination on the first ballot. And I'll credit Plato- the very next day he came and gave me my seven hundred dollars. That was quite a boost for my college education. In 1960 seven hundred dollars was a lot of money when your tuition and board was around twelve hundred dollars. That's what I remember of the 1960 election.

There was another instance. Muskie was in the U.S. Senate at the time, and this was I believe around 196-, but Kennedy was elected President and so it would have been '61, for the '61-'62 session. I got a call from Ed Muskie, and I had been assistant floor leader elected after the '58 election during my second term, to Lucia Cormier, who was floor leader. My freshman year, of course, I didn't run for a leadership position. Adam Walsh, the infamous, one of the seven mules you know, or seven horsemen and four, let's see, seven mules and four horsemen from Fordham? Well Adam Walsh, no, or did he play at Notre Dame? I'm thinking probably of Jim Murphy here in Old Orchard. Well anyway, Adam Walsh was a football coach and quite a legend in football at Bowdoin College, was our floor leader. And a guy named [Eben] Elwell was our assistant floor leader.

Well anyway, after the 1960 election I had thought of running for floor leader, and I got a call from Ed Muskie. And I can remember his saying to me that he wasn't calling to tell me what to do, but he wanted to give me some background information on how they had encouraged a gentleman named Ervin Fogg from Madison, which is a heavy Republican area, to run for the

legislature on the premise he had had some previous experience and experience when Ed Muskie was in the house of representatives, that's the state house of representatives. And would I step aside and, where they had encouraged him to run on the premise they would support him to be minority floor leader, would I step aside and run again for assistant floor leader?

And it wasn't a big decision on my part. I was very loyal to the party, and of course, I respected Ed Muskie's political judgment and, he was a pragmatic if he was anything else. And so although I really believed I had the votes, I did step aside, and Ervin Fogg was a gentleman. He didn't engage in debating much. He allowed me all the debating, a chance to develop my debating skill, I wanted to, so that we got along very, very well. And as it turned out, it was probably better for me, because after the '62 election I ran for floor leader, and I didn't have hardly any opposition. The opposition was just token opposition. So sometimes it pays to be patient.

**MR:** And during your stint as a legislator and later on as clerk of the House, how much contact did you usually have with Ed Muskie? Was it regular contact?

**JP:** Well, he tried to, whatever opportunity he had, there are two things about him that I noted. First, he was always very issue oriented. Both, he had teamed up early with Frank Moray Coffin; both he and Frank Coffin were very issue oriented. They knew that good issues could overcome personalities. They sensed it, and they were right, that if the Democrats were to become a majority party, if we were to change things around, of course we had to have a better caliber of candidates than we'd had prior to the '54 election, but still, you had to bring people into your organization with issues. So I noticed that about him. And at the time he died and they asked me to comment, that's what I noted the most.

Also, he himself was very disciplined. And I think he also knew that, you know, he had a responsibility to build up the Democratic Party, not simply on the basis that it was good for him politically but that if we were to be successful, you can't just articulate the issues. At some point, you have to put them into law. So on that basis he was around. Also, his staff was always available to us if we needed anything, so, while he was in Washington, D.C., his staff was very helpful to us. So there were contacts in that fashion there. And he, you know, he made a general effort to attend all the political functions, and the political functions were really built around him. So, it was a, you know, a two-way street. You knew if you were going to have a successful political function, you had to have Ed Muskie there. And, you know, as with myself, he was the father of the modern Democratic Party in Maine. So it was only natural for those who had been in on the original team, if not in a formal sense, you know, informally, to be present wherever he was present.

**MR:** And you mentioned Muskie's staff. Who were some of the people on the staff that you worked closely with?

**JP:** It's ironic, Don Nicoll was his administrative assistant, yeah. And so I remember Don Nicoll from way back when he was executive director of the, executive secretary of our party,

under Frank Morey Coffin, who was the party chairman at the time. So, you know, those were good people to get associated with. And they believed in the things they were articulating and so there was nothing phony about any of these people. So there wouldn't be any cynicism on young people such as myself to get in line and to be supportive. And, you know, we had plenty of opportunities, too, because we were a young party. There were plenty of opportunities for us early in our political life. Like I said, you know, I was a floor leader at twenty-three, reelected assistant floor leader, reelected at twenty-five, reelected at twenty-six, and became clerk of the House at twenty-eight, so there were ample opportunities. Ed Pert was only a year older than I was. I like to point that out whenever I see him, also.

**MR:** What were some of the committees you served on in the House?

**JP:** My first committee was Public Utilities. In every committee I was on, and everything I did, I always learned something. Alton Lessard, who had been a prominent Democrat, was a senator from Androscoggin County, from principally Lewiston-Auburn area. And I can remember there was a fellow named, whose last name was Garland who was testifying before our committee. And I had won a lot of debating championships, and I thought I was a pretty good debater. And this poor fellow named Garland was not that alert, neither that articulate, and I really proceeded and roasted him a few times. After the hearing, Alton Lessard called me over. He said, "Jerry," he said, "let me tell you something." The last person you would want to press is somebody less articulate than you, or less sharp than you, because the audience will be sympathetic to that person. If you go after anyone, go after someone who's your equal or better than you, and then that way you won't have the audience against you." So I learned a lesson that time.

I should have learned it before that because I can remember in high school I was debating a brother-sister team from Sanford High School. And I would stand up when I'd cross examine someone, and I was leaning over this, their last names were Nicky, and I was leaning over the sister and asking her all kinds of questions, and she started to cry. I looked at the judges. There was a brother from St. Ignatius, and some English teacher from Sanford High, and I think a local minister as the judges of the debate that day. And I knew I'd overdone it, so I should have learned my lesson at that time. It took Alton Lessard to teach me the lesson a second time. So from that point on I was very, very careful who I would ask the questions to and how I would ask the questions. And even to this day I'm the same way. I don't think you have to win every argument. Sometimes it's best to keep quiet. And you don't have to go for the jugular every time.

So, Public Utilities, and it was a new language really, the Public Utilities language is a language of its own. So that was a good learning experience for me. Then, my second term I was already on the Appropriations Committee, and of course the so-called all-powerful "Appropriations Committee," unquote, is a learning experience. That was good for me also. Then I was on a state government committee, I guess. But all the committees, I did my homework and I sponsored a lot of bills. It was kind of frustrating, but I can remember my last term I sponsored twenty bills. I might have got two or three out of those twenty through the Republican legislature and to get Governor John Reed to sign it. Subsequently when Nick Denton replaced

me in the House of Representatives and I was then clerk of the House, after the '64 debacle, in '65 I got in to cosponsor all those bills that I had lost. He passed every one of them.

**MR:** And before the interview, actually, you were telling me about some of these bills. What were, what was the nature of some of there?

**JP:** Well, one of them was minimum wage for fire fighters. Another interesting thing, in '65 and '64, my assistant floor leader in the, when I went in the first legislature, was Dana W. Childs, who later became judge of probate in Cumberland County and who had been a Republican from Portland at one time and was very, very respected. In '65 he became, he chose not to run also. No, no, he had ran; he was a member of the House, he became speaker of the House. And as clerk of the House I was below him, so we reversed the roles.

And the Republicans had passed a bill when they were in the majority saying that the clerk of the House essentially, when they renovate the House, would be responsible for the renovation of the House. They had appropriated the money. They left him in effect as a sheer dictator on the renovations of the House. One of those bills that I was, had always been unsuccessful in passing was to have an electrical roll call system. Because one session they had for example, sixteen hundred bills introduced, they'd have had only sixteen roll calls out of sixteen hundred bills. One percent of the bills, your citizen back home could know how you voted. I thought that was terrible. So I was unsuccessful in getting it passed as legislation, but as clerk of the House I made it part of the renovations. Dana W. Childs, who was speaker of the House, went along with it. So the tote board that you now have in the legislature that you see was a by-product of my having lost that bill a few sessions when the Republicans was in the majority, and we got it through as part of renovations of the house in the '65 and '66. Now today, you know, you can get the voting record on hundreds of bills in the House. And subsequently it kind of shamed the Senate; they put in an electrical roll call system also.

Another one, although, I was successful in passing because when I was majority floor leader, John Reed was governor, and the Republicans were split about increasing the sales tax. John Reed wanted to increase the sales tax. The Democrats I think we only had about thirty-eight members at the time, but they needed some of our votes to get it through, so I made a deal with John Reed and the majority floor leader of the house and senate that if they changed the reapportionment formula in the constitution that I would get them just the number of votes that they needed to pass the sales tax. I wouldn't guarantee them all the thirty-eight, but they only needed a handful of votes to pass it. Because, like I said, the Republicans in the House were split over it.

So we did make the deal and I did deliver. And the reapportionment formula at the time said that if you have a major fraction after you've reapportioned within the sixteen counties, the smallest community, or the smallest county, whichever it was, would get those numbers. Well, it didn't guarantee them sixteen seats in the House, but it did guarantee them several, enough so that they can, in a close election they always had the majority. And so they reapportioned that, that it would go to the largest community; that was the change that I had. I'd written it on my kitchen

table at home and I'd given it to Severin Beliveau, a friend of mine who is a prominent lobbyist today, to go over for technical reasons. And we shook hands, John Reed and I. And to this day, with the exception of probably a couple terms, the legislature's been Democratic. So there was some horse trading even in those days.

**MR:** And what was it like to work with John Reed in general, compared to maybe Gov. Muskie or Governor Clauson?

**JP:** Well, Muskie I'd s-, when I was, we were in the minority, so you can't really judge. And he was astute; he didn't waste his veto, even if it, they probably couldn't even be sustained. I've forgotten what the numbers were, but when we were in the minority, we were really in the minority. Then Doc Clauson came along after the '58 election, but he died after nine months in office, and even then we didn't have a majority in the house or senate. So I've never served where you've had a Democratic governor and a Democratic majority. So I had to have, to develop these horse-trading skills. In fact, there was a Monty Tindale who was the majority floor leader from Kennebunkport when I was minority floor leader. We became friends because we wanted to bring, quote, the "bacon," unquote, to York County. So I would associate with a lot of Republicans for obvious reasons, because, you know, if you really wanted something when the pie was cut, you had to have some Republican friends on board or you didn't get in on, you didn't get a slice of the pie. So we became fast friends because of a common interest, namely York County, and as a result I got some things through. But you never get, in those days a Democrat didn't stand much of a chance to get any bill through. Like I indicated to you on the archives bill, they would take your name off the bill and substitute somebody else. It would become a committee bill.

**MR:** And were there any other legislators that you can think of that were a big influence on you while you were in the house, or that you worked closely with?

**JP:** My second term, Lucia M. Cormier, ironically also from Rumford, who in fact I think taught Ed Muskie languages, either Latin or French, at Stevens High School, which was the high school he attended in Rumford. She had quite a bit of influence on me. She was the original teacher/mom, you know, and she would pull on my pocket a few times when I was too eager to debate, and I learned quite a bit from her. Adam Walsh was, talked to us more like we were a football team than legislators, but I had a lot of respect for Adam as well. But, and then there were some Republican legislators I had a lot of respect for. One of them was Roy Sinclair, and Bob Haskell, president of the senate who worked well with Ed Muskie.

Also, you want to bear in mind that Ed Muskie had what they then called, which was one of my bills to repeal, and was repealed subsequent to my becoming clerk of the House, had a Republican governor's council to deal with on all appointments. And so, you know, it was, not only did Ed Muskie have to overcome a heavy Republican majority in the House and Senate, he also had an appointment to deal with, a Republican governor's council. Plus, the constitutional offices were all Republican, you know- the attorney general, Secretary of State, the treasurer and the state auditor. So it wasn't easy to be successful as a Democratic governor. So, you know, he

used what power that he had as a governor, and authority that he had as governor, rather judiciously. It was, you know, some young and eager people thought he wasn't moving fast enough, but I understood why he could only get so much.

**MR:** I'm going to actually stop the tape and flip it over right now.

*End of Side A*  
*Side B*

**JP:** . . . . told you how we got the tote boards, the electrical roll call system. Now I'll tell you how we got Ken Curtis elected. At least I'd like to think so, and he thought so at the time. It was. . . .

**MR:** Actually, before we begin- this is the second side of the tape of the interview with Jerry Plante on July 8th, 1999. And, you were talking about, before we started the tape again, you were talking about your biggest political coup, and I think you were just going to go into it.

**JP:** When I was clerk of the House, Ken Curtis had expressed an interest in running for governor, and I had given him my word that I would support him. And crucial in 1966 was the Maine Labor Council's endorsement. In the past Ben Dorsky, who was the head of the Maine Labor Council, had been very friendly, and understandably, to, with John Reed. And he had to deal of course like we had to with the majorities that were Republican in the House and Senate. And the word was that Ben Dorsky and others were going to get the Maine Labor Council and the labor people in convention to endorse John Reed over Ken Curtis. This was in anticipation of the 1966 election. So Ken Curtis was discussing this with me and I said that I might be able to help.

So I started doing some research on John Reed's labor votes, and I found they were atrocious, you know, against workmen's comp and against unemployment comp, against minimum wage. And so we called it the Maine's Labor Manifesto. And so I wrote it kind of an overnight-type thing after doing the research. And I, we didn't have a fax machine in those days, so I had somebody send it down to the building trades who were supporting, the building trades were supporting Ken Curtis. And they reproduced it overnight the day prior to the convention and distributed all, I just read it over the phone to Ken Curtis. And he said, "I'm going to go with it," and he went with it. And we distributed it at the convention, that labor convention. And the endorsement was turned. The would-be endorsement of John Reed became the endorsement of Ken Curtis.

Now it wasn't just the ten or eleven thousand that they were going to give to John Reed from the Maine Labor Council, but all the other labor organizations, all the other labor outfits outside of the state of Maine as well as within the state of Maine, based on that endorsement, would be giving money to either John Reed or Ken Curtis. So the result of it, not only did he get the ten thousand, which was a lot of money back in '66 in a Democratic campaign's coffers, he got all the other national labor, on the basis of that, to support him. And he beat John Reed. He sent me

a little note subsequent to it saying, "Jerry, I think this was the key to my election as governor." And so, it goes to prove again issues and research can overcome anything. And that was a tough, Ben Dorsky was a tough guy to overcome.

**MR:** And for how long were you clerk of the House?

**JP:** Just two years, just two years. During that campaign Peter N. Kyros was running for Congress. And as I indicated I was on Ken Curtis' election team as a volunteer. And one of my functions was to coordinate things with Peter N. Kyros, who was running for congress in the first congressional district. We took a liking to one another. The first time we had met was in 1958, when Ken Clauson [*sic* Clinton Clauson] was running for governor. Again it's ironic- he used to debate Horace Hildreth, Sr., who had been ambassador to Pakistan and then been a former governor, and Ken Clauson was a chiropractor from Waterville; that's why they called him Doc Clauson.

Peter Kyros at the time was the state party chairman, and I was of course issue-oriented because I was assistant floor leader in the House. So they asked me along with Peter Kyros to prep Doc Clauson for governor, for debate, in anticipation of debate. And we met at the Vesper Hotel; the hotel has since become a condominium at that site here in Old Orchard Beach. And we had Doc Clauson in the room for six to eight hours throwing questions at him, prepping him for answers, throwing questions, prepping him. Six hours. And Peter Kyros was very alert, very articulate, very erudite. And I was very issue-oriented and I knew the issues, and I'd been a state of Maine debating champion, so I knew the points that ought to be made. And so we, that was our job: just the two of us were prepping Doc Clauson for the debate that was going to be that night. And, you know, six hours, nothing but questions and answers for probably what might have been a half an hour debate, probably an hour at the most. And of course, everybody anticipated Horace Hildreth, Sr. to slaughter Doc Clauson in a debate, because Doc had no legislative experience. I think he might have been mayor of Waterville, but he didn't have much legislative background. And Hildreth, you know, had been governor, ambassador to Pakistan, and was expected to slaughter him in the debate.

As it turned out, Doc did quite well. He had remembered all the answers and he stuck to the script. And if he didn't beat Horace Hildreth in the debate, the expectation had been so great, if he just did as well it would have been a victory for the Democratic Party. I may have been a little prejudiced, but I thought he had outdone Horace Hildreth. I think Horace Hildreth might have underestimated him because of difference in the background. But anyway, Doc Clauson went on and won that election.

And, so that was kind of fun, too. I enjoyed doing things as a ghostwriter or prepping people for debates. Running for public office, I've lost interest in that long ago myself. But that's when I first met Peter Kyros. So here we are. I'm coordinator with, more or less an informal coordinator between the Curtis campaign and the Kyros campaign. After the election, Kyros gets elected in '66, Curtis gets elected as governor. Now Curtis has suggested to me that probably there might be a spot on his staff for me, but in the meantime Peter Kyros had asked me



to help him recruit people for his congressional staff. To make a long story short, the recruiter ended up being recruited, so I ended up being an aide to Peter Kyros for eight years; The best of both worlds- Washington, D.C. salary, and working out of the Portland, Maine congressional office. So that gave me eight years of legislative experience, two as clerk of the House, eight as a congressional staff member. And then subsequently when Kyros lost in '74, and I got done in January of '75, the position of town manager in Old Orchard opened up on an acting basis. And, other than an interim of nine months, I was town manager for fifteen years in Old Orchard Beach. So I had about thirty years of experience at the legislative level, at the congressional level, and at the municipal level.

**MR:** And what were your years as congressional aide to Peter Kyros like? What specific tasks did you usually do, or were you pretty much all-around?

**JP:** Here again, I was always interested for two reasons. One, because of my age in the legislature, I, one of the first bills I introduced in '57 was, they had a residency requirement for old age assistance. It was archaic; you know, something like you have to have lived in Maine five years within an eight-year period before you could qualify. So Dean Fisher, who was commissioner of that agency on health, had asked me to sponsor the bill, and I did so and I was successful. It's one of the few bills when I was in the minority that I got through.

But I always took a liking to senior matters. First, I thought it was good politics because I was so young, I would not have been expected to be sensitive about those issues. I became sensitive because my grandparents in Waterville, the Gadbois. At that time also, when I was going to college, there was the Kean-Anderson Bill, the precursor to the Medicare Bill. And I headed a group when I was in college called Maine Citizens for Medicare. At that time Margaret Chase Smith and Ed Muskie were United States senators, and I think every member of the House might have been Republican. We had three, at one time we had three congressional members, then it got reduced to two. It's possible Frank Moray Coffin might have been a senator from the old second district at that time.

But anyway, it was our job to lobby our delegation and encourage people to support Medicare, the so-called Kean-Anderson Bill. My grandfather was a very successful agent for Met Life, saved his money, a very prudent Franco-American, large family, and he thought he was comfortable. My grandmother became ill, he became ill, wiped him all out. That was prior to Medicare. So I was very, I'd seen the problems associated with ill health and the elderly early in life, so I was always sensitive to senior matters. And so on Kyros' staff (this is why today I'm so familiar with Social Security reforms, and I've promoted some things myself), I dealt mostly with Social Security matters, casework, and the bulk of the casework dealing with Social Security, or senior issues.

**MR:** And who did you work with on the staff for Peter Kyros?

**JP:** His administrative assistants were out of the Washington office, and there was a steady change of personnel at the Washington level, so I ended up being the senior member on the staff,

not in age but in time in service. And while they had administrative assistants down there, I pretty much did my own thing here in Maine. And whenever they came home every weekend, for eight years I never took a vacation. And I had very few days off, because he'd be home almost every weekend, and I'd be traveling with him, so. And I was also very oriented to what was going on at the state level as well. So when he went on talk shows, if the issue came up and happened to be a state issue, I could slip him a little note. Because some people don't differentiate between state legislative matters and U.S. House of Representative matters. So I always stayed aware of what was going on locally at the state level and at the federal level. I still do to this day.

**MR:** And I know Peter Kyros' family was very involved in his campaigns and in his work. Did you get to know them fairly well?

**JP:** Oh yeah, (*unintelligible word*) his son and his daughter, and of course his wife. Peter Kyros, Jr. was a very bright person, a Yale graduate. He's practicing law now in Washington, D.C., as well as his father. And his sister practices law, her husband practices law. They're not all in the same law office, but they're a very, very bright family.

**MR:** And then you said from '75 to '90 you were town manager of Old Orchard? What was that like?

**JP:** Well, Old Orchard Beach politics can be the toughest politics in the world, in fact, just prior to my coming on board, they had had one town manager who lasted only three days. Another town manager (and these guys were considered tough guys, they were locals), lasted three months. Another one from Massachusetts had taken the job and someone had threatened to shoot him. We all thought it was a joke at the time, you know, that's what it was meant to be. But some people are very sensitive to those things, so he chose not to take the job. And so they offered it to me, and that's how I ended up being town manager.

With my disposition, if anyone came in and threatened to shoot me, I always had an open door policy. My door was always open, but he would have been thrown out the window rather quickly. So, and see, and also I knew all the local characters, so they didn't waste much of my time. Everybody was welcomed or I'd go to their home. They could come to my home here. I never had an unlisted phone. But, you know, I had to get the work done and I got the work done. If some guy just wanted to come in just to shoot the bull, I was respectful of him for a few minutes, then after them I would just simply say, "Hey, get the hell out of here; I've got work to do." Now someone from Massachusetts or from out of state, you know, wouldn't be able to get away with that. So I did get a lot work done and we did accomplish a great deal.

**MR:** What were some of the issues that were very sensitive in the town?

**JP:** Well, the first one was the location of the new fire department. They had appointed a committee to find a location, and they had passed a bond issue. And the wrangling went on for about eighteen months or so before I became town manager. During that time they had a high

inflationary period in the mid- to late-'70s. And so, you know, just on inflation alone, while they were wrangling they'd lost about thirty thousand. So I suggested to the council that they eliminate the committee and appoint a committee of three: myself, the chief of police, and the fire chief. We'd pick the site, we'd get the thing going. Within a few weeks we did so and because we had lost the thirty thousand to inflation, we got the town to do the site preparation. And we picked the location which was the highest point in town, and then that way it would make it easier for the fire trucks and the rescue units to come out of there, no matter where they were going. So that was the first thing I had to overcome.

Then I pushed, because of my contacts with eight years at U.S. Congress, I knew HUD laws rather well, so I pushed for elderly housing. And on a per capita basis, we ended up having more elderly housing than in any other town in the state of Maine. And in addition, they had passed a regulation, HUD, that you had to take some family housing in too if you were going to get some elderly housing. You couldn't just get the cream of the crop, because you know there was no educational taxes dealing with elderly housing. So I got a family housing project done as well, so. Even to this day I think as far as family and elderly housing, on a per capita basis, we probably have more units than anybody else.

In addition to that, there'd been an effort to close some dilapidated schools on School Street and build a new high school. And I got the council, which is rare, to appoint me as town manager as, on the committee to, because there had been some moratoriums on funding, legislative moratoriums and administrative moratoriums when Longley was governor. So they elected me as chairman and we went to work and we built a new high school. And the secondary treatment plant had to be expanded.

And I was interested in the environment, and there was a three-legged program we got going. We had the first dune grass management program in the state of Maine. To this day, I think, it's probably the most memorable thing that I did, because in the long run if they get a hundred year storm, the dune grass management program was so successful. I'll tell you a little story about that, too. We had submitted a request for a grant for dune grass-forty thousand dollars for a hundred and twenty thousand culms, C-U-L-M-S, that's what they call a seedling for dune grass. And it had been denied, so I appealed. And remember I'd told you earlier I'd worked for Jack Kennedy '58 and '59. So I appealed, and they sent the hearing examiner here in Old Orchard Beach. I forget his first name, but his last name was White. And he called me before the hearing and he called me outside the room. The hearing was here in Old Orchard Beach on the appeal. And he said to me with a big Irish brogue, he says, "Mr. Plante," he says, "are you the young man that worked for Jack Kennedy in late '50s?" He says, "Are you the same person?" I said, "Yes sir." He says, "I think we're going to get along very well."

That was rather encouraging because, you know, we hadn't done much as dune grass management. The reason they had denied is that we couldn't show that we'd done sufficiently. But I don't know, if in between times from the time we wrote the grant and the time we had the appeal that we did that well, though it might have been because of the association that Mr. White, the hearing examiner, and myself had had with the Jack Kennedy campaign, but we got

the forty thousand dollars and we got the project done, and I've never told this to anybody publicly before.

So it goes to show, I had a lot of people tell me, well, you know, you've been in politics as if, you know, a town manager doesn't exercise or participate in the political process, you know, everything they do is in a vacuum. Time and time again, when I was successful in getting grants for Old Orchard Beach, it had to do with my political contacts. Because whenever I called, you know, a congressional office or federal office or state office, I didn't have to tell them who Jerry Plante was, and they also would answer my calls very promptly.

And so we got the new high school built, and we got the dune grass management program. I also got a federal grant for a transfer station, got a federal grant for a, to take care of sludge disposal facility. And we teamed up with Saco and they then paid the major bulk of the operation of the, that sludge conversion plant. So we had, you know, dune grass management, expansion of the treatment plant transfer station, and the sludge facility. So things went rather well; I was rather successful as a town manager, brought a lot of money into Old Orchard Beach.

**MR:** And what was the partisan situation like during your years as town manager in Old Orchard?

**JP:** Well, as I indicated to you, although I was the first Democrat since 1883 elected to the legislature, no Republican has ever won that seat to this date. David Lemoine is a Democrat, so we've never lost that seat since '56. So we've gotten organized pretty well. In fact, in '56, between '56 and '58, I'd personally enrolled eight hundred Democrats. For a town this size, that was a lot of Democrats. I broke up and upset a lot of families who were traditional Republican families. The younger members of the family, the siblings, out of friendship enrolled as Democrats. And so, I didn't realize at the time I was causing some family heart aches, but I did so. But I never pretended I was other than a Democrat when I was a town manager, although I did not engage during that fifteen years in any partisan activities. But that isn't to say that people holding office didn't call me and seek some surreptitious advice. I just was not overtly political.

**MR:** And, what did you do after your years as town manager, in the '90s? What work have you pursued?

**JP:** After resigning as town manager in 1990, for a few years I was an insurance agent with Met Life. I'd gotten my Series 6 exam and I'd passed all the state exams, and so I was selling insurance as well as mutual funds. I did rather well, but I wanted to get back into the public sector. So the Green Thumb position opened up, and it was dealing with senior citizens and training and work experience and getting them jobs. And a lot of times it was answering some of their questions during intake periods, so I was really comfortable at that and I had a good background for it. And it's worked out very well, so I hope, I'm sixty-four now, I'll be sixty-five in January, I hope to work with seniors until I'm about in my seventies or eighties. I have people in our program that are ninety-one and ninety-two, so when I go around anywheres I kind

of feel like I'm the teenager in the group.

In fact, I'm president of our local chapter of AARP in Saco, and I'm probably the youngest person in the, that attends the meetings. And I'm sixty-four and you can join AARP when you're fifty, and it seems only the older people, only the older members of AARP participate in the local chapters. We've got a good chapter, and that's something I enjoy. It shows I haven't lost my political skills, apparently.

**MR:** And how would you say. . . .?

**JP:** I'm also chairman of the Saco Bay Planning Commission. Again, it deals with the environment, Saco Bay. And finally, after all these years, the three towns abutting our beach, Scarborough, Saco and Old Orchard Beach are getting together so that we can properly manage and look after our beach together, not just the portion that's in front of our boundaries.

**MR:** Well it sounds like actually with your involvement with the dune grass grant and the Saco Bay involvement, you've had a lot of work with environmental issues. Was that also. . . .?

**JP:** It's been a rocky road, environmentalist, because a lot of times when I felt the municipality should do it their way, and some people at the DEP felt it ought to be done their way. But the main thing is that we got the job done, and we got it done as economically as possible for the town. There's some DEP types that, you know, they hound you to do this or to do that, when they know you're about ready to do it, and they think it was a product of their efforts that you got it done, where it was never the, that was never the case. I always wanted to do things as far as the environment was concerned, but I wanted to do it in the best interest of the town. And it took a while to, for those people to catch on, but we did get the job done and we were way ahead of other people. In fact Old Orchard Beach led the way for treatment plants on the coast. We had our first one in 1959. It was a primary treatment plant; it's now secondary and it has since been expanded. And now, you know, as far as environment is concerned, Old Orchard Beach, certainly between '75 and '90, was a leader in, as far as municipal efforts with respect to the environment.

**MR:** Did you sponsor or propose much environmental legislation while you were in the House in the '50s and '60s?

**JP:** They had one person associated with the DEP at the time- a guy named Rayburn McDonald; I think that was his name. And he did give me some bills and I did cosponsor them. So even back then, in fact those were the two areas, areas dealing with seniors and areas dealing with the environment, when I was in the legislature that I was pretty much in tune with.

**MR:** Would you say that Muskie's involvement with the environment in the Senate was a big influence?

**JP:** There is no doubt about it because Muskie in his, you know, in his first term, particularly

his second term, strong environmentalist. I don't know when *Silent Stream* was written, but I'm sure Ed Muskie must have read it early in his, in his political life, because at the time it was not the issue that subsequently had the sex appeal that it did. And I understood that he took it on and he was on that committee in the U.S. Senate on the basis of Johnson disciplining him. I don't know how true that was, but there is no doubt that he earned the title of, quote, "Mr. Clean," unquote. And there is no doubt that his leadership at that time had some influence on me.

**MR:** Getting back to the Old Orchard community, how would you say it's changed, maybe socially, economically, ethnically, any of these areas over the years that you've been here?

**JP:** Well, there was some gentrification that took place, because I felt at the time I became town manager the tax rate was rather prohibitive. And people from my working class, which is, you know, my background, could not afford to live in Old Orchard Beach if we didn't change things around. So I was very, although a Democrat, I was very pro-business and very pro-construction. So during the height of the construction period in the '80s, I promoted the construction of condominiums. That brought in a lot of fresh money into Old Orchard Beach where we have some very valuable property, and it allowed us to do it by going up rather than spreading out, because we're only seven and a half square miles. We have the second smallest township in the state of Maine. Only Ogunquit has 6.5 square miles. The two largest townships are Scarborough, the second largest, and Ellsworth, the largest. So Ogunquit was part of Wells at that time; they had sixty-five square miles. When they separated, they became the smallest township in the state of Maine. Old Orchard Beach used to be. We're second now.

So you had to go up. And you had such valuable property it didn't make sense just to have a single-level type of situation. So that brought in a lot of people that were educating their kids; it brought in a money interest that was essential to broaden our tax base. And it's worked out very, very well. While the taxes are still high in Old Orchard Beach, they would be substantially higher if it weren't for the condominium construction. So that was, I'll take credit for it. At the time there was a lot of wrangling over it. Even dune grass management at the time, some people that had been life-long friends of mine didn't want us to take twenty feet of beach-front for dune grass. But after a few one hundred year storms, particularly after the '78-'79 period, they understood it. And now everybody supports that "garden in the margins of a restless sea."

**MR:** And what would you say about the ethnic situation in Old Orchard? Has it (*unintelligible phrase*)?

**JP:** Oh I think, I think it's changed, and it's changed for the better. I can remember running in, the first time I ran for the legislature in 1956, a street in back of the town hall, I knocked on the door. And a woman who I subsequently learned her name was Sadie Munster, and she said to me, quote, "Mr. Plante, I have nothing against you personally, but I don't allow Catholics on my porch." And I was kind of shocked, because, remember I told you earlier how all my peers in high school, at the high school, had accepted me and elected me to all these positions, and I had been elected governor of Boys' State. My wife was a, had been brought up as a Methodist. I'd never heard of that. Oh, I'd been called a "frog," you know, when I was in the, during recess

periods, but it was more of a joke than anything else. And I was kind of built like a hydrant, they didn't call me that too often. So it was kind of a shocker to me. So I thanked her, and her son-in-law and her daughter are friends of mine and supporters of mine, so I was very, very surprised.

But today, today things have changed immeasurably. I showed you a photo of Ed Muskie with four Old Orchard Beach citizens wearing cowboy hats in 1964, which was theme. He was a United States Senator at the time. And on the left is Nick Denton who was running for my seat in the House of Representatives, a Greek American, Ken Curtis who was running for Congress, subsequently became governor of the state of Maine, English background of course, Ed Muskie, the son of a Polish immigrant, Joe (*Unintelligible name*) who was our party chairman at the time, the son of a Lebanese and Irish mother, same combination as George Mitchell, and myself, Jerry Plante, obviously a Franco-American. And I state on the back (I gave this to Peter Denton at the time), I says, "Best regards to Peter- P.S.: only in America."

And that's really the situation in Old Orchard Beach. Plus we have a Jewish community and a very small Italian community. But there are many ethnic groups here in Old Orchard Beach, and I think it's made, the diversity has made Old Orchard Beach stronger. And I think I can say that I don't know of any prejudice in Old Orchard Beach. Because, you know, minorities pretty much stick together, as that photo indicates. And so it doesn't take long when, if someone is prejudiced against an ethnic group, it won't be long that they'll come around to you.

I'll give you an example. I was sitting in the hallway of the third floor in the legislature and I was talking with a representative from Kennebunkport. His last name was Emmons. And he says to me, he says, "You know, Jerry, we don't have any trouble with French Canadians at the port, but we do with some of the Jews." And so, I, he was a much older gentleman than I and I thought, "Well, should I put him in his place and straighten him out right now or just let it go?" So, I'd remembered Alton Lessard's lecture- if a person is stupid, don't try to educate him. So I just simply went back into my office. I think I was clerk of the House at the time. That night we were playing cards. David K. Marshall, who was on the Public Utilities Commission at the time, who I mentioned to you had been judge of probate, a lobbyist named Brown, and a legislator named Melvin Lane from Waterville. Melvin Lane ran a butchery shop and he'd Anglicized his name. He was of Jewish background.

So we're playing cards that night at the old Augusta House, just nickel and dime stuff. And Melvin starts to tell us that how he had talked to Mr., Representative Emmons. And Emmons was telling him, and that was probably because on my behalf that he was mentioning this, but he says, "I was talking to Representative Emmons, and he says to me, he says, 'they don't have any trouble with Jews at Kennebunkport.' He says, 'It's those Canadians, those French Canadians.'" And so I started laughing and then, so, that's when I learned that, you know, if one guy's prejudiced towards one ethnic group, it won't be long they'll be prejudiced against yours.

I sponsored and supported that anti-discrimination in tourist area legislation when I represented Old Orchard Beach, and supported anti-discrimination in public housing. And the B'nai B'rith

organization gave me an award, so, I'd forgotten this incident. But I think now I would, even out of respect for others, I think if anyone would give me a statement of that nature, I think I'd put him in his place today.

**MR:** And, I don't know if we covered this actually, but what year were you married?

**JP:** I was married in 1961, in June of '61, so it's been thirty-eight years. I tell people that I'm saving my money for our fortieth wedding anniversary. I'm thinking of taking my wife to Hawaii. And I was telling this to a friend and he said, "Well, if you take your wife to Hawaii for the fortieth, what are you going to do for the fiftieth?" I said, I'll go back and get her." Then we have four children, Scott, Andrea, Lisa and Dean, two boys and two girls, and I have five grandchildren. Four of them live downstairs, and the little girl there is my son's granddaughter; she lives in town also. So I am the luckiest grampy in the world.

**MR:** Cute-looking kids.

**JP:** Yeah, I have five kids and they all love me and I love them. In fact, the four downstairs come up and kiss me "good night" every night. I told them long ago that whenever they forget, Grampy cries, so they want to make sure Grampy doesn't cry. They come up every day and kiss me "good night." I'm very, very fortunate.

**MR:** Well, congratulations.

**JP:** Thank you. In fact of all the titles I've had, you know, minority floor leader, clerk of the House, congressional aid, town manager, the best title in the world is "Grampy," and that's the one I enjoy the most. I've got several "Grampy" hats around the house. And like I said, we've got thirteen steps; I call it the thirteen disciples. And they come up every night faithfully and kiss their grandmother and I "good night." And my children are the same way. Political pressure never bothered me. And a lot of people thought, "God sakes, how can he take all this stuff?" you know. But I would kiss my own kids "good night," tuck them in and say their prayers, and I could take on a million Republicans the next day.

**MR:** That's wonderful. And has your wife or other members of your family shared in your political work?

**JP:** My daughter Lisa was a staff, on George, Senator George Mitchell's staff in Washington, D.C. My son Scott operated an elevator for a brief period also in Washington, D.C. while he was working on his master's degree in architecture. They have not, and my daughter Andrea worked for Senator Peter Denton's campaign. And while they had not chosen to run themselves, they've been associated with other campaigns. I don't know if I had anything to do with it, but they're all very strong Democrats, and I think the grandchildren are heading in the same direction.

**MR:** And, I guess just some general comments, your take on what Governor and Senator Muskie has done for Maine politics and politics in general.



**JP:** Well, as I indicated, first, he never embarrassed us. He always was issue-oriented. He showed a patience and a discipline that we all should, as parents and as patriots and as politicians. And I think he had a great capacity to communicate. You know, both he and Frank Moray Coffin were debaters at Bates College. He had, he was a son of Polish immigrants; like ourselves, he worked hard. I think he was a bellhop at Kennebunkport; he had to contribute to his college costs. He was to minorities an example that there's a chance for you, because of his success.

Nice family- Jane, his wife, you could be proud of. I think, when you look at it, and then you know subsequently George Mitchell who had been on his staff, even the Secretary of State today, she had been a staff, on Ed Muskie's staff. The person ran for President of the United States. I think if it had been other than '68 when he ran for vice president with Hubert Humphrey, he would have been elected. I think he was far the better candidate when McGovern beat him, but it wasn't to be. I think, I think basically, you know, he, the man had some values, had some meaning. He wasn't a phony.

Today, you know, members of the U.S. Senate and House, too many of them just respond to what the poll says you ought to do. Real leadership is lacking in many instances. Fighting for things you believe in, even if you lose, is not wrong, and it takes time. I saw it in my life. Time and time again I would introduce legislation, get beaten, and like I say come back and give the legislation to somebody else and they'd get it through. If things are worth fighting for, they're worth waiting for. And you ought not to, and I think he showed that you ought not to just take what's popular at the time and run with it. I think that's really the example of Ed Muskie.

**MR:** And, is there anyone else in the area that you can think of that we might contact for this project, that might be useful to interview?

**JP:** Well, you know, I got on board when I was just twenty-one, and I campaigned with him his first, when he ran for his first term at nineteen. I'm sixty-four now. I think you guys are a little late. The people that started with him in '54 and '56, many of them have died. So I, probably Senator Peter Denton, but Peter came, I think he came after, (his is Nick Denton's brother), I think Peter came after Muskie. There aren't too many that are still alive that worked with us at that time. In fact, I can't think of any. As I go back to "welcome back" days in the legislature, I see those of us, you know, who served in the '98 [*sic*] legislature or earlier, we're getting fewer and fewer in number. [*interruption*] I can't think of any.

**MR:** Is there anything else that we've missed or that you'd like to cover, or any stories that you have or anecdotes or anything you'd like to talk about?

**JP:** No, I've confessed to more things here today than I have in a life-time.

**MR:** Okay, well thanks a lot for your time. It's been great.

**JP:** Okay, Mike, thank you. Good luck in your project.

**MR:** Thanks.

*End of Interview*