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## Puiia, Vito oral history interview

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## **Interview with Vito Puiia by Jim Ross**

*Summary Sheet and Transcript*

### **Interviewee**

Puiia, Vito

### **Interviewer**

Ross, Jim

### **Date**

July, 1985

### **Place**

Rumford, Maine

### **ID Number**

MOH 005

### **Use Restrictions**

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### **Biographical Note**

Vito Puiia was born on September 24, 1914 in Rumford, Maine, the third of eight sons. His parents were both Italian immigrants, his father settling in the Rumford area to work for Mr. Chisholm, building the Oxford Paper Mill. His mother was a homemaker. He was a classmate of Ed Muskie's, meeting Ed in middle school, and sharing a homeroom until graduation. They played basketball together, were both members of the science club, and were members of the National Honor Society. After High School, Puiia served in the military. Upon discharge, he returned to Rumford and worked in the shoe repair trade.

### **Scope and Content Note**

Interview includes discussions of: building of the Oxford Paper Company; homeroom at Stephens High School; Class schedule at Stephens High School; Muskie teaching classes in high school; respect for Muskie from his peers; recreation and entertainment in Rumford in the 1930s; the Rumford Mechanics Institute; Muskie's demeanor in high school; Rumford geography (the sections of town); Alfred Gagnon and his fishing trips with Ed; Stephen Muskie's tailor shop: physical description; buying a suit from Stephen Muskie; Muskie family relationship; ethnic

backgrounds and relations of Rumford; school dances; Muskie as an athlete: basketball and track; Muskie studying at the Lewiston basketball tournament; Rumford basketball team; social observations of Muskie in high school; Muskie's siblings; Muskie family's religion; churches in Rumford; Muskie's academic competition; paper based economy; the Androscoggin River of the past; changes in the Androscoggin River; Rumford Winter Carnival; and Muskie's political aspirations in high school.

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## **Transcript**

**Jim Ross:** What is your full name and current address?

**Vito Puiia:** Vito F. Puiia, 437 Franklin Street, Rumford, Maine.

**JR:** When and where were you born?

**VP:** September 24th, 1914 in Rumford, Maine.

**JR:** You spent all your, you've grown up, you grew all your life?

**VP:** All my life right in Rumford, outside of when I went in the service for two years in WWII.

**JR:** Did your parents grow up in this area, or did they move from another area?

**VP:** My parents came from the old country, but we were all born here.

**JR:** Okay, when did they come here, about what time, do you know?

**VP:** Oh boy, let's see now, I'm seventy so they had to come here before that, at least seventy years ago. They come from Italy.

**JR:** When they were over here, what did your father do?

**VP:** At that time Mr. Chisholm was building the Oxford Paper Company. And most of those old Italians that came here at that time were laborers building the Oxford Paper Company, which today is Boise Cascade.

**JR:** So, I take it that that's what -

**VP:** He was a laborer.

**JR:** Now what did your mother, was your mother just a homemaker?

**VP:** She just stayed home, she brought up eight boys so she had to stay home. There was eight of us in the family.

**JR:** Okay, now, all right, how many of these were brothers and how many were sisters?

**VP:** Eight brothers. We lost two at childbirth which were sisters. I don't even remember them. And with the eight boys, us eight boys are still living.

**JR:** What was the, were you the oldest, were you the youngest?

**VP:** No, I'm the third.

**JR:** All right, now did those other two, the two older ones, did they know, did they associate with Ed at all, or did they know Ed Muskie at all?

**VP:** Oh, they knew him, sure they knew him.

**JR:** Did they, were you, I take it you were close to -

**VP:** My brother Camello, he was two years ahead of us in our class, which Ed was in, and my brother Joe was one year ahead of us. But they all knew him.

**JR:** Yeah, but they didn't associate with Ed as closely as you did.

**VP:** Well no, I was in is class so naturally I knew more of him, saw more of him.

**JR:** Now, all right, you did go to high school with Ed, that's when you first met him.

**VP:** Met him when we went to junior high, and then we went four years of high school. The junior high was located in the high school building.

**JR:** All right, so you went eighth grade with him, and then ninth (*unintelligible word*).

**VP:** That was eighth grade, and now we call them freshmen from there up, four years of high school.

**JR:** Do you remember when you first met him, when you first -?

**VP:** Well, it was what called the home room. Like I said before, my last initial was P, his was M, so I wasn't sitting too far from him in the homeroom on account of our initials. They put them alphabetically, so I was pretty close to him in whatever classes I happened to be in with him on account of that.

**JR:** So you were basically just during home room. What was the general gist of home room, what would you do during -?

**VP:** Well, that's where, when school started and the bell rang, we all went to this room. And then from there we went to our different classes.

**JR:** All right, so you'd like have a group get together whatever. You'd have like a, would it be the whole class or would it just be a certain class of people?

**VP:** Well, what do you mean by get together?

**JR:** Well, what would you do during home room, would it be a, what was the point of home room?

**VP:** Well, that's where we had to report to school in the morning.

**JR:** All right, and that was it. So it wasn't like, you know, they went over the news.

**VP:** (*Unintelligible phrase*) whether we were absent or in school or not, then from there the bell rang and we'd go to all different classes, see, during the day.

**JR:** Okay, all right, now what was the routine like for the school day? You say after home room you went to classes, what was a morning like and what, how many classes would you have in the morning, like?

**VP:** Well, now, that's fifty years ago, a good fifty years ago. Well, like we went to, whoever had history went to a history class. I forget how long that history class was, had to be at least a half an hour. Or if you went to physics class you went in down to the physics room, if you took chemistry you went to the chemistry lab. We'd all get out through the halls and go to those different rooms.

**JR:** Okay, all right. Now, for like recess, I mean, all right, was there like a break in the morning period? Or was there like (*unintelligible phrase*)?

**VP:** Not in high school. At that time, at noon time we all went home to dinner. There was no cafeteria in those days, so that was our one hour break at noon. We'd leave there about eleven thirty and then one o'clock we had to be back in that home room to start the afternoon session.

**JR:** So you had from eleven thirty to one o'clock was your -?

**VP:** Yeah, we, in those days we walked to school, there was no buses.

**JR:** Right, so it took time.

**VP:** Like Muskie, he lived up in what we called the Virginia section, that's way, probably a mile, mile and a half up in the Virginia section. He walked from there to the high school. And you think in the winter time, today you got buses.

**JR:** Yeah, it's a long way.

**VP:** It's a long walk. And they'd walk home for dinner and come back by one o'clock.

**JR:** So now where did you live in relation to the high school?

**VP:** I used to live on what was called Railroad Street. You come right up the 108? You went right by where my house used to be, where our house used to be. There were five or six houses up there, and they tore them down and built that road there. We never owned the land, my father used to pay three dollars a month rental fee to the power company, never would sell us the land. Then some high and mucky-muck took it upon themselves to build that 108 right through where we all lived, about five houses. We got to take the houses down, get out. So that Railroad Street is no more. The name is still there, Railroad Street, but the houses are gone. That's where we were brought up.

**JR:** All right, okay. So now you would go home for -

**VP:** Dinner.

**JR:** For dinner. All right, now -

**VP:** Then we'd go back, one o'clock the second, the afternoon sessions would start. And we'd meet in that home room first.

**JR:** Again, for the afternoon.

**VP:** Oh yeah, the teacher would see if you were absent or tardy.

**JR:** Okay, now what, were there certain type of classes you were expected to take? I mean were you expected to take a certain curriculum, or -?

**VP:** Depended what course you signed up for. See, I knew I never would get to college, we had no money back in those days. That was Depression era, period. Nineteen, from '28 to '32, that's real depression. Nobody had anything. But some of the boys, they took college course. Ed was one of them. Well, he was so much smarter than most of us anyway, he knew he could swing it somehow on scholarships and all of that, which no doubt he did get scholarships, he must have.

**JR:** Well, yeah, considering it was the Depression.

**VP:** A fellow like me from a little Italian family, how could I go to college? I would have loved to have gone, but.

**JR:** But you never did.

**VP:** Oh, no.

**JR:** Did any of your brothers, did they ever -?

**VP:** One brother went to college, Dominic. He went to Colby. But he got some sort of a scholarship on his athletic ability. He didn't graduate.

**JR:** All right, so when you, all right, now the classes are split up by college, business.

**VP:** Well, we had I took what was called a general course.

**JR:** All right, and general.

**VP:** Then there was a college course. Well, that was the two main ones, you either took up, get ready to go to college or you didn't, see. That was the two main ones.

**JR:** And that was, college and general.

**VP:** Yeah, the more influential kids that come from better families, they always took college courses. Ed didn't come from a rich family or what we call a big shot family, he father was just a tailor, old Steve, he was a tailor. But he still took that course. That was nothing for him. I don't know if I could ever pass a college course.

**JR:** So you basically, you had to take those certain -

**VP:** Yeah, they had certain subjects in each course. See, like what I took in my course was English, history, I took algebra, physics, which I couldn't do at all. If it hadn't been for Ed I would have flunked it. I used to copy his paper. Is that on there? Well he used to help me. I never could fathom that at all. He could. Seems to me he didn't even have to study, everything just seemed to come to him. He was just, any time a teacher was absent, they never had a substitute teacher, put Ed Muskie in, ran the class better than the teacher.

**JR:** Would they really do that?

**VP:** Oh yeah, they did it. He could run that chemistry class better than our chemistry teacher, Mr. [Bertram] Faulkingham.

**JR:** So now, what, now if there was, like a teacher was absent one day they would ask him to, would they -?

**VP:** A lot of times they asked the students, the smarter students.

**JR:** So now what, all right, well what was it like when Ed taught a class? I mean, what, I mean what did you think about, you know, Ed sitting up there teaching? Was that surprising?

**VP:** Oh well, like I always says, he was smart, and everything come to him. While the rest of us had to dig for exams and this and that, he was just a natural.

**JR:** I'm trying to get real specific on like what he was like during this class, when he was teaching like a class.

**VP:** Very serious.

**JR:** Very serious.

**VP:** Oh, there was no fooling around. I think, in fact I think he ran the class when he did take it a little bit stricter than the regular teachers. And we all respected him. Nobody would say, well, we'll take it easy today, Ed's up there as the teacher. He knew he was respected.

**JR:** So, if it was expected that a certain assignment were to be completed, right, for a certain, for the day of classes, and if the teacher didn't show up, they'd expect some student -

**VP:** Well, maybe some probably didn't, but most of us we did it just as if the regular teacher was there. Of course it didn't happen often, you know. If a teacher was sick and they couldn't find a substitute in a hurry. But he filled in quite a few times.

**JR:** And would he do this in a variety of classes, or would he -?

**VP:** Well I know he took over the chemistry class once in a while. I don't remember if he took over the physics class. That's when you mentioned that (*unintelligible word*) that Frank told you about. But he could handle any of those classes and not bat an eye.

**JR:** Oh really? Now, when you took this general course in high school, the general selection, what was the difference between that and college. I know you're saying it's a lot more difficult but, what were you focusing on?

**VP:** Well, for instance, in college you had to take Latin, in our course we didn't have to. That was one of the required classes you had to take in a college course. You took Latin, a lot of them took a foreign language also, a lot of them took French. I never did because I figured I wasn't going to college, what did I care about learning to speak French. I could speak two languages anyway.

**JR:** What were they?

**VP:** Well, my folks were Italian, and I learned English.

**JR:** All right, so what else, in, like in an English class, right, what, how would that be different?

**VP:** Well, the English was the same whether you went to college or not, it was still basically the same. English class was the same English teacher. But like in physics he was way up in that. There was a, back in those days there weren't so many subjects as there are today, see. If you took college course you had to take a foreign language, you probably took algebra and physics, and English, history. Everybody had to take English and history, no matter what course.

**JR:** Right, okay. Now, in the afternoon, was there a certain set of courses taken in the afternoon that weren't taken in the morning, or was it, it didn't matter? Was it just a-?

**VP:** Well, some courses you took in the morning, some in the afternoon. I forget whether it was two or three classes in the morning, probably two in the afternoons.

**JR:** All right, now what would you do after school. Besides sports, let's not get to sports yet. But what, let's say you weren't involved in sports or whatever, what would you do on an afternoon that you didn't have -?

**VP:** After I got out of school?

**JR:** Yeah, would you go straight home, was it let's go out and -

**VP:** I used to go to work.

**JR:** Go to work, now where would work?

**VP:** I used to work in a shoe repair shop and shine shop, shoe shine parlor in those days. I used to work after school and Saturdays.

**JR:** Every day?

**VP:** Every day.

**JR:** Oh, all right, so then when would you practice for a sport then?

**VP:** Well, I found time to play basketball and track, I could get on.

**JR:** Now when would you, all right, you would, would you have team practices then or not?

**VP:** Basketball we used to practice, well it was a regular, we had a regular coach like they have today. In fact in those days when we were sophomores and juniors, we used to practice up in the old institute building because they hadn't built the gym in our high school yet, there was no gym there. They built the gym in the high school our last year in school, in 1932. Then we would get out of classes in the afternoon, and sometimes we'd have them after supper, we'd go back at night. And our basketball coach was Mr. Faulkingham, he was the chemistry teacher.

**JR:** Okay, all right, stop there for a second. Where, during school, all right, let's say you, you said you had no breaks at all, did you ever have like periods off like they do nowadays?

**VP:** Second period. We used to go upstairs in what they called a study hall. Long rows of seats and you'd go up there to sit and study. And there'd always be a teacher there to oversee us.

**JR:** Did it vary, did some students have fourth period?

**VP:** Oh yeah, it was different hours for that study period, different times. So the whole school wouldn't be in there at once, you couldn't get them in there probably.

**JR:** All right, so -

**VP:** They had two periods of classes; my third period would be study hall.

**JR:** All right, and you have to go straight there.

**VP:** You just went through the halls and upstairs and then to the study hall.

**JR:** So it would be the same kind of thing as a class but you'd just be in there and studying and doing your homework.

**VP:** Yeah, you'd be studying.

**JR:** All right, so did you, now going to and from class, all right, this may sound really detailed, but would you stop or did you have lockers that you'd go to, or did you have a place where you'd put your books, what would you do during in like that five minutes?

**VP:** Back in those days we had no lockers, no lockers. I don't remember where we used to hang our coat. I think there was hooks out in the hall there, outside our home room. And we had no lock-, the only lockers used to be downstairs in the shower room. But upstairs in the school there was no such thing as lockers in those days like they have today.

**JR:** So then during classes you'd just carry your books, all of your books?

**VP:** All our books, we carried, what we didn't, we knew what class we were going to so we carried the books we needed in that class. The rest we'd leave in our desk in that home room. When that class was over we'd come back to home room and go to the next class and we'd take the books that we needed from the home room. Go through the halls, upstairs and down. See, where the, that's where the chemistry lab was. If you had chemistry you took your chemistry book or whatever you had, your homework if you had any, and you went down to the chemistry lab.

**JR:** Now, during, what would you, would you ever sit and chat, I mean did you ever have time to chat with friends or to hang out with friends during that home room class or during, you know, between classes?

**VP:** Well, not during class, not too much, you know, because the teacher, you know, quiet, but going from one class to another, going through the hallways, you always talked to one another.

**JR:** Did you ever like, I'm sure you ran into Ed an awful lot, or did you?

**VP:** Oh yeah, back and forth. He had to come back to that home room, too.

**JR:** Now was he, all right, now when he was going to and from class, was he very, you know, let's go, go to this class, you know, or was he, did he just, well just want to talk just as much as anybody, or what was he like during that period?

**VP:** He was just like the rest of us going to classes. If anything he was on the shy side.

**JR:** Oh really?

**VP:** Back in those days.

**JR:** Why would you say that?

**VP:** Well, you said about talking and all that. But when it come to the class room there was nothing shy about him. But to mix with other people, not too much. But, depends what he was doing.

**JR:** Class as opposed to more -

**VP:** You know, just horsing around or something like that, he never was one to horse around. He never, if we were like outside waiting to go into school in the morning, everybody else would probably be throwing, in the winter time, probably throwing snowballs or doing something. I don't think he ever threw a snowball, not that I know of, maybe he did, you know. He wasn't that type.

**JR:** Did you ever walk home with him, or walk to school or walk -

**VP:** Oh, certain places but I never walked to Virginia because that's where he lived and I was in a different part of town.

**JR:** Right, but would you, like, you were, now is Railroad Street in the same vicinity as Virginia or not?

**VP:** No, no. See, when you come up 108 you come up where Railroad used to be. Now to go to Virginia, you have to go back down this street, way down to the bridge that you crossed that way, that goes up the hill by the power company. You saw the power company up there by the bridge? Well he used to live way up in there. See, that's the Virginia section.

**JR:** So he had a heck of a walk.

**VP:** We all did. Well, my wife isn't home tonight, but she came from the Virginia section. They'd walk to school every morning, go home for dinner and walk back by one o'clock, up that Falls hill there. And that's a cold spot in the winter time, you know, the wind. No buses.

**JR:** Did you ever like, would you ever run into him walking to, or all right, say, before a class, or before school, did you ever -?

**VP:** Oh yeah, probably outside the building, yes. Or we'd get in the home room before classes started, we were all, you always talking, you know, bumping into each other. I wasn't sitting very far from him, probably a desk or two.

**JR:** In home room did you, is that where you like voted for class presidents and stuff like that, or?

**VP:** No, that, the class president we would go off into the study hall, that's where we'd vote for the class officers.

**JR:** So was there ever like a, all right, class meetings where you'd get the whole senior class together?

**VP:** Oh yeah, sure.

**JR:** What would those, when would those happen?

**VP:** Well, sometime in the beginning of the year because you had to elect a class president and you had to elect a class vice president, secretary, treasurer. See, like the last year's senior, that's the year you're going to graduate so, I can remember that because I was elected class treasurer, in my senior year.

**JR:** So then how did you, all right, now what did you do about going about getting elected, I mean not that you tried to go out and get elected, what did you, what was the process in getting elected for a class position?

**VP:** Well, the class just voted.

**JR:** Would you nominate yourself? Did you nominate yourself?

**VP:** Somebody would nominate you, I wouldn't think I nominated myself. Somebody nominated so and so for president, something like that. But we didn't, it wasn't like today, all these politicking, you go around building everybody up, you vote for him or I don't vote for the other guy.

**JR:** Did you ever go over to, during lunch, to Ed's house, ever? Or did you not -?

**VP:** I've been in his house, not while, not much during the school years but I have been up in his house up in Virginia. He didn't live too far from where my father and mother-in-law lived, just a couple of houses away.

**JR:** Oh really, what were their names?

**VP:** My father-in-law was Alfred Gagnon. In fact he took Ed fishing and hunting and couple of times. How did you know?

**JR:** I've heard a lot about it.

**VP:** From who?

**JR:** From his sisters, from Ed's sisters, and from Frank, too, and from, yeah. I believe maybe-

**VP:** See Ed's father and my father-in-law were very, very chummy. They'd go fishing in those days, they'd go up to, well what we call Rangeley today. Of course there used to be a

railroad track from Rumford up there, then the big flood took it out, took the bridge out. They used to get down in the morning and they'd go up there, fish for the whole day, come home with a packed basket full of fish. Or they'd take a blueberry special train up in the blueberry season, they'd go up and pick blueberries all day, Mr. Gagnon and Mr. Muskie.

**JR:** What was, I take it you had the opportunity to get to know Mr. Muskie, or at least know what he was like.

**VP:** Ed's father?

**JR:** Yeah, Ed's father.

**VP:** I knew him well. In fact I bought a suit from him. He used to make suits when he was a tailor shop on Exchange Street, that's down in the business section, sure, old Steve Muskie. We used to call him old Steve, that was his name, Steve.

**JR:** And you called him old Steve. Now what was his -?

**VP:** We called him old Steve, and we'd call young Ed, and it stuck.

**JR:** Now what was old Steve like, I mean what -?

**VP:** Something like his son. Very slow and easy talking, never would talk fast or get excited. Ed was kind of that way, too, unless somebody really rankled him up, you know. Then he would let you know, with a . . . But the old man was very, very, very, very quiet. He was just a tailor, come from the old country, he learned the trade there.

**JR:** What was, I take it you also went to his tailoring store, outfit.

**VP:** Yeah, he had a, we used to call it, in those days, call it a tailor shop. People would bring pants there to sew a pocket in or shorten the cuffs. Or if you wanted a tailor made suit, he'd measure you and he'd make you a suit that fit you perfect.

**JR:** You said you got a suit there.

**VP:** I did buy a suit from him.

**JR:** Now was that, was he, was it expensive or was it -?

**VP:** Back in those days, sure. I paid thirty dollars for it, and I used to work for seventeen dollars a week. You know, Depression days, twenty bucks a week was big money. I think we lived pretty near as good as they do today if you make two hundred. Of course everything else was cheap.

**JR:** So Steve Muskie was, did you go, he made good stuff or was it -?

**VP:** He made a good living, he made a living like everybody else. He was a, what do you call it, a tailor, barber, shoe repairer, all in that class. They learned that when they were kids growing up. They didn't go to college for that. That's just like me, I'm a shoe repairer, that's the way I learned it.

**JR:** Didn't have to go to school for that.

**VP:** I'm still learning. Shoes change styles, everything changes styles, so you got to keep plugging.

**JR:** That's true, that's very interesting, you never really think about it, but that's true. Was Mr. Muskie, when he, you know, how did he treat you? Was he kind to you, or was he distant, did he give you -?

**VP:** I don't think you could find a kinder person. He was that type. And I'm not saying that because he was Ed's father. I don't think he had a bad bone in him. Him and my father-in-law both, the same type. You couldn't get either one of those sore at you if you, maybe some of that brushed off on Ed. I think it did.

**JR:** Lizzie [Lucy] Paradis said that when they used to go out hunting, a lot of times Mr. Muskie would never shoot at, would never hit anything, he'd shoot but he'd never hit anything. And she thought that was because he really didn't, couldn't kill anything, he didn't really want to.

**VP:** I don't think he ever shot a deer in his life.

**JR:** Why would he go out then, was it just -?

**VP:** He liked to go out, he liked to go out. A lot of people are like that, they like to get out and, I went hunting a couple of times, I saw a deer once, I just stood there and looked at it. They call it buck fever, I didn't know enough to raise my rifle and shoot. It was so close I couldn't have missed it, I had a shotgun. I never went hunting again after that. I'd get squirrels in the back yard and anybody kill them squirrels I'd shoot them. I was feeding them, you know. Ah well, that's nothing to do with Ed.

**JR:** That's all right. So now, did you ever go to his tailoring shop, were you ever a part of his tailor, I mean went in there.

**VP:** I went in there, yeah.

**JR:** I mean, what was it like. Was it, now you have to realize I'm coming from many years later so, try and describe the store, the shop to me so that I can kind of picture it.

**VP:** You went, say you come off the sidewalk, there's the door. You go in there, and there's

two, three Singer sewing machines like what the women sew clothes on, mostly women do that work today. And he, the old man would be sitting there and see somebody came, he'd get up and he'd wait on you.

**JR:** So it was like a desk, he would be -

**VP:** Yeah, there was a counter there, see. Well, you probably had a pair of pants that, my pockets are ripped out, can you put some new pockets in. Or the zipper's gone, put a new zipper in. Or a pair of pants was too long, shorten them, you know, rip them up and then hem them back, whatever they did. Just like anything else.

**JR:** So he, did he have people working with him or was this his -

**VP:** If I remember right he had one man working there at that time with him. And quite a while after this little Italian kid come over from the old country, couldn't speak a word of English, and he happened to be taking up the tailoring business. He'd been an apprentice in the old country. And he came here to Rumford, old Steve took him in, he went to work for Steve. Vito Umbro. Ed would know him.

**JR:** Oh really. When was, what time was this, was this when you all were in high school?

**VP:** Well, about that time, yeah. That kid couldn't speak a word of English when he came to Rumford, but he learned, part broken English, very good, and he had a head on him. In fact when old Steve died he took over the tailor shop, he ran it until he died. After that, that was the end of the tailor shop.

**JR:** That's interesting. So did this little boy have family over here?

**VP:** Oh yeah, he got married. He had a son, a couple of daughters if I remember right.

**JR:** Was his mother and father over here or not?

**VP:** Oh yeah, yeah, they both came from the old country with all the rest of our parents.

**JR:** And settled in Rumford.

**VP:** The settled in Rumford, they lived in this what they called the Smith Crossing section. When you come up 108 there, you went right through but you didn't know it. That's the Crossing.

**JR:** All right, okay. Now, when you ever saw Ed or, and Mr. Muskie together, what would, how did he treat his son?

**VP:** I didn't see them together too often, because I never had the opportunity, you know, I saw Ed in school and after school I wouldn't go see what he did at night, see. So I really didn't see

him and his father together too often, and like I say they lived way up in Virginia. Very seldom I went up there, see. But as near as I can tell they got along darn well, they got along pretty well.

**JR:** Very close.

**VP:** Very close, yeah, it was that type of a family.

**JR:** What, being a, this seems to be a very ethnic area, being, you know, having a lot of Italians and stuff.

**VP:** It is, there's Italians and French especially. Then there's Lithuanians, but there's only two Polish families. There's a difference, Lithuanians and Polish. I don't know if I should say this, the Lithuanians we called "square heads," Polish we called "pollacks." We used to call the Italians "wops," you know, and Frenchmen were "frogs." But back in those days we all knew each other so nobody -

**JR:** It wasn't, yeah.

**VP:** But if you said it and meant it, we would be offended, see. But amongst ourselves it was all kidding. "Ah, that frog what does he know?" And "Ah, you wop, what are you doing?"

**JR:** All right. Now, was, the feeling that I got from his two sisters was that Mr. Muskie was very proud of his Polish ancestry.

**VP:** He was proud, he was a proud man.

**JR:** He was very proud of that and very, you know, -

**VP:** He's not one of those men that will go around and spout and brag, never. No, he's just easy going, talking easy, did what he was supposed to do, took care of his family. I don't know as he ever did a wrong thing in his life, from what I knew of him. Maybe he had a temper which I don't know. What I know of him, I didn't see it.

**JR:** What was, all right, now, on his mother, what was his mother, what was -?

**VP:** I didn't know his mother too well. She never left the house for, never got out like. In those days a woman stayed home. They're not like the women today. They stayed home and kept house and got the meals ready and did housework. They didn't have cars to run around with. They never went, and the old man used to do the shopping I guess in those days. Nobody had cars.

**JR:** So they didn't have the opportunity to get out.

**VP:** No, you didn't, nobody wanted to get out, everybody stayed home nights. Outside of a few lucky ones when the cars started getting so where somebody could afford them. If you could

afford eight hundred dollars you could buy a pretty good car.

**JR:** Yeah, I guess so. What is, did Ed ever, I mean, did parents ever punish Ed, I mean would they ever like say, all right, you can't go out?

**VP:** Maybe they did.

**JR:** You don't know.

**VP:** Maybe they did. Every parent did to a certain extent I suppose. I imagine he did, too, at times. Maybe he didn't. I don't think he did it too often if he did do it.

**JR:** All Right. Okay, now you said that during the summer you did spend some time with Ed. Now, what -?

**VP:** Well in the summer time I worked. I don't know what Ed did in the summer time. I don't think, I don't know, I doubt if he worked. I don't remember him working. I don't know what he really did in the summer time. Hard to answer that question.

**JR:** Yeah, so you would be working from eight to five, what, -

**VP:** Sure, stores opened at eight o'clock, they closed at five. That was it.

**JR:** So would you ever, what would you do after that, after eight to five? Would you go home and go to bed?

**VP:** Not at five o'clock.

**JR:** No? All right then, what would you do?

**VP:** Play ball. We had a little, scrub games we used to call them, you know, different streets had a team. Then they had the institute built back in those days, that's where we'd all go. It was like a -

**JR:** Rumford -

**VP:** Rumford Mechanics Institute in those days. Today it's the Rumford Community College. Back in those days it cost the family five dollars and we'd all belong for the whole year and we'd just live in that gym up there, see. That's where we spent most of our boyhood days, up in that building.

**JR:** You'd go up there and play basketball and -

**VP:** Basketball, and they had a big room with lounge chairs and they had the newspapers every day, and they had an old Victrola, you could play records.

**JR:** So would Ed be there, would you (*unintelligible phrase*) -?

**VP:** At times he was there, at times he was there, but he didn't, he didn't go for that stuff, he didn't go for that stuff.

**JR:** He wouldn't be there often for like scrub games as you say?

**VP:** No, not, I don't know, I don't know if he ever played baseball. I never saw him play baseball. They had a team up Virginia but he never was on it.

**JR:** Now would you, all right, would you go to the gym and play basketball ever or -?

**VP:** Yeah, mostly basketball, mostly basketball. Of course they had a, they had those mats on the floor if you wanted to take a crack at wrestling or gymnastics, they had all that stuff back in those days.

**JR:** Was it through the gymnasium that when you'd get together after work or whatever that you'd, most of the basketball members of the team would start to kind of develop, or is that where you found players?

**VP:** Oh, no, we were all from the high school team. That was a different group altogether during high school, we had our regular practice sessions. That's when Ed made the squad.

**JR:** Now did Ed try out, or was the coach like, ah, you're really tall, I want you?

**VP:** Well that I don't know, whether he really tried out or whether the coach asked him to. See, the coach of the basketball team was Mr. Faulkingham, he was the chemistry teacher, too. But he was tall, he was the tallest guy we had. But he -

**JR:** He tried out.

**VP:** He tried out, he stayed on the squad. But he wasn't cut out to be an athlete, he just wasn't cut out for that. He was cut out up here, he had a head on him, he didn't worry about athletics. That's the difference.

**JR:** Now, when you saw Ed, at least basketball wise, all right, I think you know him before he'd started to play.

**VP:** Oh yeah.

**JR:** Now when you first saw him out there on the court, what did you think? I mean, did you think, "Oh God, he's trying out for the team," or what, I mean did you, how did Ed as a basketball player first hit you?

**VP:** Hit me?

**JR:** Yeah, I mean what did you think of him as a basketball player?

**VP:** That he'll never make it. But he stuck it out, I'll give him credit for that, he stuck it out. But he wasn't cut out for it. A lot of tall guys are not cut out for it, no matter how much they'll push. I don't think he really cared about it, I don't think he really cared about the sport to begin with. Maybe he did, I don't know.

**JR:** So when he first tried out it was kind of -

**VP:** Well, he was on the spleeny side, tall and skinny. He wasn't fleshy like he is today, he was just a bean pole, you know. Today he's filled right out.

**JR:** Yeah he has. Yeah, that's true.

**VP:** Big difference.

**JR:** Now when you tried out, how many guys would try out for this team, how many, do you remember how many?

**VP:** Probably twenty five or so, at the most. You'd end up with about twelve, enough for two teams and a couple of extra players. Five on a team, so you'd, you wouldn't have more than fifteen on a squad, no way. Basketball, there's only five playing, you'd have five subs, and maybe another couple.

**JR:** Now, all right, now explain the game to me. I underst-, from what I gather it was different then from it is now. You scored a point, you scored a basket -

**VP:** After you scored a point the ball was dead, the referee would take the ball and go up to the center, and the two centers would have a jump ball. I don't remember what year that went out, but that was, that got quite a long time ago and it stayed in for a long time. Now they score a basket, the other team takes it off under their basket, play don't stop. Back in those days, play stopped and we'd work plays from that center jump. That's what we'd practice and practice. Somebody (*unintelligible phrase*), we'd put up a finger or two, and that meant the center's going to tack to the left forward, or another finger, keep going to the right guard and the other guard would come around the back, and there were plays ultimately.

**JR:** Now who was the other person who was the center, besides Ed?

**VP:** Let's see, back in those days, 1932, well, it was another square head, Peachie Sobek, and there was Stan, no, Stan Sotman, no, Stan Sotman was later. The main players on that 1932 team was Anton Wagnis, he was a captain, Steve Weliska, had two square heads, then there was myself, Arnold Sinclair, Willard Batchelder, Ed was on the squad. I had the old high school book, the picture's in there. I lost mine somewhere years ago when I moved. I wish I had it here

to tell you, it would show the different clubs, see. He belonged to every club in school. Debater, nobody could touch him on the debating team, nobody. Well, even when he went to Bates, he was one of the top debaters at Bates. Did you know that?

**JR:** Actually yeah I did, Bates still actually has a heck of a, I have a friend up there, he's at the debate institute right now, and they're ranked like fifth in the nation. (*Unintelligible phrase*).

**VP:** Well back then he was one of the tops when he went to Bates.

**JR:** Wow, wow. All right, now this basketball, this is really what I want to focus on with you is, now did Ed, all right, now he tried out, what year was he on, was it ninth grade or was it? Okay, in the year book there's one, two, three, four. Is that ninth grade, tenth grade, eleven, twelve?

**VP:** No, that would be junior-senior year, the last two years of school. That's the two years I was on it.

**JR:** All right, now when he tried out, did he start, did he begin the game, or -?

**VP:** No.

**JR:** All right.

**VP:** No, he would go in sometime during the game for so long, then he'd come out. He wasn't a star.

**JR:** So he wasn't, the coach didn't heavily rely on him then?

**VP:** No, no he didn't. He was a first sub for center.

**JR:** Okay, so now when he'd go in, what would the coach -? He would, all right, Ed would sit on the bench and then the coach would say to him, "Ed, go in."

**VP:** Ed would go in as center.

**JR:** And he'd go in.

**VP:** He'd go in.

**JR:** And how did he play? I mean, was he just, was he good out there. Was he really awesome, was he good out there or did he stink?

**VP:** No, I don't want to put that on there.

**JR:** Well no, I mean was he good or bad? I mean, if he was bad, he was bad.

**VP:** He was good, he tried. But he wasn't a, it's hard to say, he wasn't cut out to be an athlete, period. He wasn't cut out for that. I don't even know why he went out for basketball. Maybe the coach talked him into it. I don't know.

**JR:** Did he ever, did he score a lot of points ever, just being tall, that tall?

**VP:** No, he never scored a lot of points, not that I can remember. No, he was just a, one of those things. He wasn't an athlete. He liked hunting and fishing better than he did basketball.

**JR:** Now, so he didn't obviously get wrapped up in these games that you all played. He wasn't like, or did he?

**VP:** No, I don't think, that didn't bother him too much, whether we won or lost, I don't think it did.

**JR:** I mean he would never, would he ever cheer on the bench or was he quiet?

**VP:** He never, he's not the type to get excited. Maybe he did, but I can't remember, you know.

**JR:** But he would never like during a game that was close, within a couple of seconds.

**VP:** Get up and start clapping? No, no, he wasn't that type, no.

**JR:** Really. Even when you scored the last point, the last, you know, (*unintelligible phrase*)?

**VP:** Oh, maybe he did, I can't remember.

*End of Side A*  
*Side B*

**JR:** All right, now I'm just curious about the coach. What was the coach like? Now, you said he was a chem teacher, right?

**VP:** He was a University of Maine grad, and he coached baseball, basketball, and football, back in those days, you know. One man coached three sports. There were no assistants. Today there's about five assistants, and they don't know beans from brick. And he was teaching besides.

**JR:** So, now what was he like with you all? I mean, now during a practice did he bust you, did he make you work really hard, or was he kind of like -?

**VP:** Who, the coach?

**JR:** Yeah, what was he -?

**VP:** Oh, we knew we'd get through a workout. He made us run and go through fundamentals, and work through those plays off that center jump like I said a little while ago. When we got done, we knew we had a workout.

**JR:** Would he make you run, like do, you know, -?

**VP:** Yeah, we, he'd go out, he'd make us dribble around the floor so many times to learn how to handle the ball.

**JR:** And do free throws, I guess do the same kind of thing with free throws and stuff.

**VP:** Oh yeah, yeah. And then, get on one end of the court, he'd get up the other end and he'd roll the ball to us and we'd have to run up and scoop it up and start running with it without muffing up that play. Learn how to grab a loose ball from the floor, see, how to scoop it up and keep going. And we'd dribble around chairs on the floor.

**JR:** So it sounds like it was kind of actually interesting.

**VP:** And we'd shoot so many fouls every night before we took our shower, get up to that foul line and, take twenty five shots at that basket. Yeah, just like they, of course today it's a different game.

**JR:** Now when you, I forgot what I was going to say. Now the times that you all played, when was the practice again, what times would you -?

**VP:** Sometimes they were right after school, sometimes they were after supper. Depends when the gym was available, because other people used that gym besides the basketball team.

**JR:** Now, was there a JV, junior varsity?

**VP:** Oh yes, there was junior varsity.

**JR:** Now was there, was Ed on, could Ed have been on those his first two years, or-?

**VP:** I don't remember, I don't remember.

**JR:** So what did you try? You tried out for your junior and senior year, now what happened to your first two years?

**VP:** I didn't have time to play.

**JR:** You didn't have time.

**VP:** Because I was working.

**JR:** So okay, after, right, okay then your junior and senior year you weren't working?

**VP:** I was working in my junior, in my freshman and sophomore year I played class basketball, each class had a team. The freshman class had a team, sophomore class had a team. And usually by the time the freshmen and sophomores got up to be juniors, then we were good enough to get on the high school squad, the best ones, see. So we graduated from the class teams to the varsity team.

**JR:** All right, so then as, did you, did he ever, did Ed ever talk to you about his feelings for basketball? I mean did he ever talk to you about it at all when you were, you know, like before you, when you were getting your, you know, in the locker room or taking showers, or, did he ever, what was, you know, did he ever say anything?

**VP:** I can't remember that. Oh, he probably would have wanted to win as much as anybody. But like I said, hard to answer some of those questions, I don't remember.

**JR:** Now your basketball games from what I've heard were very well attended.

**VP:** Oh yes, back in those days everybody went to high school basketball games.

**JR:** Now, it would seem that those who played on the team would be considered relatively, as they do nowadays, studs, you know, and you're really, you know, cool and all that. What -?

**VP:** Well, not back in those days. This day and age, yes maybe, but back when I was in school we played sports but we didn't go out and say, hey, I'm the top basketball player. Nah, we just went our own way. We had our own ways of having fun. We'd go to dances and stuff like that.

*(Pause in taping.)*

**JR:** All right, now, you said, anyway, when the, you mentioned something about the time when you went to the tourney at Bates, the championship.

**VP:** Well, at the end of the year the tournament committee in Lewiston used to pick the eight best teams in Western Maine, which included Rumford, Lewiston, Auburn, Farmington, and as rule Rumford used to get in the tournament every year in those days.

**JR:** Because they were good.

**VP:** Yeah, well, yeah, we used to hold our own with any of them back in those days. So we played a team in the afternoon, they used to start Friday afternoon. And we won our game Friday afternoon, so if we won the school, the athletic director said, "If you win your first game, you won't come back to Rumford, you stayed overnight, they put you up in a hotel." That was, like I said, the old Elm House in Auburn which is torn down now. So we won our game, so we stayed up there. We had supper, and that was a big deal in those days, you know, go out to a

restaurant and eat, the school paid for it. Then at night we had to be in bed by a certain time because you want to play Saturday afternoon again.

Of course we raised hell in the hallways upstairs, you know. We thought that was the in thing to do, you know. Tournament night, we won our first game, run around the halls and hoot and holler. Not Ed, he locked himself up in his room, lay in bed, he probably had a book he was studying, see. That's the kind, that's the type of a guy he was. He could care less about running around the hallway making an ass of himself.

**JR:** You said something about one night when you were doing, when you went to that tourney you crawled out and you saw him in his room, on the fire escape.

**VP:** Not on a fire escape, we looked up through the transom of the door, we couldn't get into his room so, the transom was there. We held one up and we looked in his bedroom, he was laying in bed with that book. Not the fire escape, we looked through that transom.

**JR:** You guys were trying to get him out to work and stuff.

**VP:** Well, we were trying to get him out to go up and have a little fun. I don't think he came out. I don't remember

**JR:** All right, now, with the, after basketball games and football games and things like that, there were social -

**VP:** There used to be a dance, high school dance.

**JR:** All right, now where was it, was it the Rumford Mechanics Institute or were they at the gymnasium, or where were they?

**VP:** Well, after they had the new gym, the last year of school, they always had them in the gym, not up at the institute. I don't know where the hell they held the dances before we had our gym. I don't remember. But our last year of school it was always in the gym.

**JR:** All right, so now what, did you have to pay to get in there, what was the (*unintelligible phrase*)?

**VP:** Well there probably, the dance after the game, I don't remember if there was a charge of twenty five cents or not, or whether the ticket to the game entitled you to the dance. I don't remember.

**JR:** Now would, I take it when you'd be, after basketball games, (*unintelligible phrase*), that after these games I mean you had these dances and if you'd won you were relatively heroes, weren't you? Or were you?

**VP:** If you won. If you lost you just somebody else.

**JR:** Was that, did that make it easier for people, for basketball, for you all to socialize with people, (*unintelligible phrase*), “good game” and all that, or was it just a dance?

**VP:** It was just a dance.

**JR:** And everyone would go. And so it didn't -?

**VP:** Once you got on the floor you wasn't thinking of basketball.

**JR:** So now, did Ed go to these? Was Ed, did Ed, did you ever see him -?

**VP:** I don't think I ever saw Ed dance in my life in school, high school. No. Maybe he did, but I never saw him.

**JR:** And he never, ever -?

**VP:** I can't remember seeing him on the dance floor.

**JR:** Now would you go to these often, all the time, or -?

**VP:** Yeah, that's when I first started to take up dancing, at those things.

**JR:** Really, at those things. And would they have a record, a Victrola, or was it -?

**VP:** Yeah, they had record players, yeah, no, you couldn't afford a band. Yeah, we'd have record players.

**JR:** You never know. All right, so you had record players and they would -

**VP:** Yeah, of they weren't like today. Those were just an ordinary phonographs they used to call them. They didn't blatt out like that, there was no loudspeakers on them.

**JR:** So now there were, these would go for, until about twelve? Too late? One o'clock?

**VP:** Oh, it wasn't even twelve, that building was closed before twelve o'clock. probably eleven o'clock or so. Even on a night of a dance, a social with no game or nothing, I think eleven o'clock was the deadline during school hours. Even a junior-senior prom, a certain hour and that was it.

**JR:** What was the prom like? Is it only juniors go, or only seniors go, or is the whole -?

**VP:** Back in those days, the juniors had a prom and the seniors had a prom. The juniors, that was theirs, the junior class. You could invite whoever you wanted for your partner. And the seniors would have theirs the following week. There was two proms. Today it's one for both.

**JR:** Now, who did, do you know who Ed invited for his senior prom?

**VP:** I can't remember.

**JR:** Have any idea?

**VP:** I can't remember.

**JR:** He did go though, didn't he?

**VP:** I can't even remember that. Like I said, I don't remember if he danced at all. If he didn't dance I'm sure he wouldn't go. He wouldn't go there just to be a wallflower, you know. Yeah, he did go. But, a lot of those club meetings, like the Latin club and the French club, they had a lot of, of course I didn't belong to them clubs because I didn't take them classes. But they had girls in those classes, too. Maybe he did get chummy with one or two of them, you know. I mean, after all, he's human.

**JR:** Now you've mentioned clubs. I know Ed was in quite a number of these clubs.

**VP:** He was in nearly every one of them.

**JR:** Now, he was in one club with you, the Pine Science Club.

**VP:** Haynes Science Club.

**JR:** Haynes Science Club.

**VP:** Yeah, that was the name of it.

**JR:** All right, now what, what was, now that was for students who did, it was a limited enrollment, limited membership. Can you describe that club at all, what was the -?

**VP:** So long ago I can't remember. Well, it had to do with either physics or chemistry, to join that club. It had to be connected with either one of those two subjects. Now which one it was, I don't remember.

**JR:** Now do you remember at any of the meetings what it was like, what that club did? Do you remember that at all?

**VP:** I don't remember, that's so far, I don't remember about that.

**JR:** Now what were the dramatics, the dramatics club. Now, did you ever go to any of the plays that they did or anything like that?

**VP:** Yeah, I went to some of the, they used to have a school play, you know. And he was mixed up in that.

**JR:** Did you ever -

**VP:** I wasn't.

**JR:** What, now did you ever see Ed act, did you ever see him -?

**VP:** Oh boy, I can't remember. That was a little out of my -

**JR:** Your area.

**VP:** I didn't go for that, you know. But like the National Honor Society, he was on that. I know because I was too.

**JR:** All right, what is the basis for that club?

**VP:** They still have it today, all high schools, they have the National Honor Society. They pick the top fifteen or twenty students in the class. And you have to have all these different requirements. First you got to be up in your studies, there's a word for it, scholarship? You can't be a dummy, in other words, you got to have, your average I think -

**JR:** Oh, grade point average.

**VP:** It has to be an eighty seven or something, or up there. Then you have to be, besides that, it took in a lot of things. I'd say like a beauty contest today, (*unintelligible word*) all those different things that people do. They still have it today, most schools have it, National Honor Society. Every graduation has pictures in the paper.

**JR:** Now, so as far as, what other clubs were you in? I mean, were you in a lot of clubs or were you -?

**VP:** Not too many.

**JR:** You were just in a few.

**VP:** The art club, that's when you made your letter in sports. I didn't have time for that stuff.

**JR:** You were working.

**VP:** I was working.

**JR:** Now, during school, or during, you know, whenever you had the chance to see Ed, was he, would you consider him a loner or would you consider him always with somebody doing

something?

**VP:** In school he was always doing something, but on the outside I would consider him more of a loner. But in school, no way, he was right in the middle of everything.

**JR:** That leads up to a question of, when did you start to notice he was a leader, you know, becoming, when did he start to show these, I mean when, he must have had something -?

**VP:** Freshman class. Right off. After a few classes, the answers he started giving the teachers, this and that. You knew he was a little out of the ordinary, seemed out of the ordinary.

**JR:** Did immediately students, or his peers and you all start to feel -?

**VP:** No matter what it was, he had the answers.

**JR:** So didn't that, you know how sometimes some students always have the right answer, they're always piping up. Did they, that didn't kind of annoy all the other students?

**VP:** No, because he wasn't the type that bragged about it. He was reserved and so quiet. He wasn't one of these loud mouths that say, you know, I know more than the teacher does. He wasn't like that.

**JR:** He'd just do what he was -?

**VP:** He did it, he just did it, did it. Nobody had to tell him to do it because he knew how to do.

**JR:** Now you said he helped you, all right, with -

**VP:** Oh yeah, if I got stuck I used to go ask him for help a lot.

**JR:** In everything, or just -?

**VP:** Well, the ones I used to get stuck in, like algebra and physics. I never get those two so I went to, but like English and all that other stuff. That algebra kept me off the honor roll two years. I just couldn't fathom it. I didn't get the basics -

*(Break in taping.)*

**JR:** Okay, now, one thing I wanted to ask about, and I don't know whether you know anything about them but we'll give it a shot. What were, what was his older sister Irene like? Now she was the oldest one in the house.

**VP:** Yeah, she's still living.

**JR:** Yeah, okay, now what was she, I mean how did, you know, she get, how, what was she

like, because she went to Stephens High, too, I believe. You know, what was she like, was she kind of the protector of the family that, you know, or did -?

**VP:** No, I wouldn't say that. She was so damn quiet, she was more quiet than Ed.

**JR:** Really. So she was in her own little world I guess.

**VP:** Yeah, yeah, she lives in that, well you went by that senior citizen place right on 108 there, that Ed Muskie development. She lives there. Yeah, she was very, very quiet. See, she was married wasn't she? She lost her husband. I'm trying to think of his name.

**JR:** Bob Chaisson, or Chaisson.

**VP:** Chaisson, yeah. No, but she was always on the quiet side. Even to this day, if she sees me, she says, "Hi Vito." But there's nothing rambunctious about her. The one you met there, Lucy, she's about the most, of the whole family, if she's got anything to say, she says it.

**JR:** She does, you're right.

**VP:** Oh yeah, yeah, she's not afraid to come right out with anything, but the other ones. . . . But nobody ever mentions his brother.

**JR:** I was about to, I wanted to ask you about him.

**VP:** Why?

**JR:** Me? Well, I was about to.

**VP:** I don't know much about him myself, except that once he graduated he went on the west coast and that was the last of him. I don't know, hear no more about him.

**JR:** Why?

**VP:** I don't know, I don't know what the story is.

**JR:** He went to Stephens, didn't he?

**VP:** Oh, he graduated from here. But he's nothing like Ed. Different type altogether, you know, he was no brain.

**JR:** So they weren't extremely close. I mean, they weren't like, you know, go places -

**VP:** Not too, no, I wouldn't say they were real close. Of course, they're brothers, you know, I don't want to say they weren't close. They probably were closer than I thought they were, you know. Hard to say.

**JR:** Because you weren't right on top of them. All right, now on weekends during the school year, what would, now you worked?

**VP:** On Saturday, on Saturdays but not on Sundays. Sunday morning we'd all go to church. He was very religious. Every Sunday you'd see the whole family in church. They were staunch Catholic, or he was in those days.

**JR:** Oh, you all -

**VP:** Most of us were, yeah.

**JR:** So it wasn't like, you know now a lot of kids are like, "Oh God, I don't want to go to church."

**VP:** Back in those days we went, everybody brought up their kids to go to church. That was a must in those days. I wish it was today, but it isn't.

**JR:** So the kids went, would have gone anyway. I mean, it was like they enjoyed it.

**VP:** They went. Of course the parents said, you go to church, you went. And after mass you stayed for Sunday school, catechism classes, study the catechism for half an hour.

**JR:** So you went to church and like, in a lot of churches you'd go, during the sermon you'd go to Sunday school or catechism class.

**VP:** You'd stay right through the mass, then after the mass you stayed another half hour for that half hour study period, catechism we call it. They had lay teachers teaching us, different women.

**JR:** Did you, now did you, would you go to the same church as Ed?

**VP:** Yeah, that was back in the St. Athanasios Church. That's where that, you went right by it, where they have that senior citizens home now.

**JR:** It's right near there, or right next to it?

**VP:** Right there, they changed the whole building over.

**JR:** Oh, that was it?

**VP:** That was it, that was the St. Athanasios Church, then they combined it with the big one across the street, the big St. Johns Church, they call it St. John and St. Athanasios. That's where Muskie went to church.

**JR:** Now, how many people went to this church? Was it -?

**VP:** A lot.

**JR:** Hundreds, or -?

**VP:** Oh yes. They'd have a six o'clock mass Sunday morning, and there'd be a seven o'clock mass, eight o'clock mass, nine, and a high mass at ten. There was five masses every Sunday. Back in those days all these ethnic groups which you've mentioned, they were all very religious, they all went to church, they believed in it. They still do, the old ones. But the kids today, no way.

**JR:** Now, at this church, did you go during Lent?

**VP:** We used to go every morning during Lent.

**JR:** All right, now you must have seen Ed there?

**VP:** Oh yeah, he'd go, of course he did. I said he was very religious.

**JR:** Right, now he wasn't, all right, how would he go dressed? Was he dressed in a coat and tie? How was he dressed?

**VP:** Well, back in those days we, Sundays we dressed up, whatever clothes we had, if we had good clothes we'd wear them. But during Lent in the morning you just went with your school clothes because from there you'd go to school.

**JR:** All right, so now would he, would people go with him? Was Ed the kind of fellow that, you know, people would go, "Oh I'll go with Ed," you know, would some people ever go with him or would he usually go by himself, did he usually sit by himself?

**VP:** If he had some chum from Virginia, they'd walk down together. You know, if he had his school boy chums up in his section, he'd probably walk down with them.

**JR:** Okay, so you would often, you would go I take it often, during Lent.

**VP:** Back in those days, sure. I go now just on Sunday, but back in those days during Lent I went every morning. A lot of us did. We used to make a practice of it.

**JR:** Now, and this happened, and you continued this all the way through high school.

**VP:** Sure, back in those days we believed in Lent. Today nobody, they don't believe in it so much today. Back then it meant something. Well, somebody would give up, well, I'm going to give up drinking for Lent, for forty days, or somebody else who happened to be smoking, I want to give up smoking up smoking for forty days, I want to give up candy, I want to give up going

to the movies. Everybody had a little thing they gave up, that was a penance. I don't know what the hell Ed gave up, because he didn't smoke, he didn't drink.

**JR:** Did you guys ever, at these social events, did you ever drink, you guys?

**VP:** No.

**JR:** Never?

**VP:** We didn't know what, I don't think I took a drink in high school. After I got out of high and started going to these public dances all around, then I started. But not in the high school, we never used to get in trouble like they do today. Of course we didn't have dope in those days, we didn't know there was such a thing as marijuana or all this crap. Maybe if there'd have been some of that stuff around, we would have tried it, who knows. We wouldn't have been any different than the kids today. If it was around, give you that -

**JR:** It was also Prohibition then, too, wasn't it, in this period, or was that later?

**VP:** Oh yeah, because I can remember for long time there was no liquor stores in town even. Yeah, it used to be down on River Street; they'd go down and buy a half-pint bootleg booze, alcohol. The night we graduated, two of my buddies in the class, not Ed, Austin McInnis, which Ed knows very well -

**JR:** Now, who's this?

**VP:** Austin McInnis.

**JR:** Austin McInnis, is he still alive?

**VP:** He's still living.

**JR:** And where does he live?

**VP:** Down in the park.

**JR:** Oh, so he lives in Mexico?

**VP:** No, in Rumford. Strathglass Park. You ought to go down and see him if you get a chance.

**JR:** (*Unintelligible phrase*).

**VP:** Austin McInnis, he'd give you (*unintelligible phrase*). Him and I and Lloyd Kaulback, he died, we wanted to do something different, it was graduation night. After graduation, we went downtown, we had a feed at Freddie's Lunch, that was *the* restaurant in those days. I don't know

who got the idea, but it was, ah, we ought to get a half a pint of moonshine. One of us knew where to buy it, so we bought a half pint. That was a real alcohol, made at home. The three of us, we drank that, fifteen minutes later the three of us were sitting on the curb on Congress Street heaving our guts out. That was the graduation night.

**JR:** I'm sure that's (*unintelligible word*) you remember, too.

**VP:** I'll never forget it.

**JR:** Well, okay, yeah, that's classic. Now for the track, now I know you were both on the same track team. What was that all about? You said Ed was an awkward at best basketball player, not -

**VP:** Well, he wasn't very coordinated very good. He was too young, you know, he was too tall. He grew so fast, see. I don't remember what he did in track. I'm trying to remember if he was a high jumper. I can't even remember. If you had the, that yearbook, the track team would be in there. Maybe this Austin McInnis has got it, that book.

**JR:** Actually, I have, it happens I do, I have photos, I left it in the car but I do have some photocopies that I got from Frank Anastasio that I could show you [that] I have of the track team.

**VP:** I must have seen them anyway. But I just can't remember what he, what Ed did in track. I really can't remember whether he was a high jumper. I don't see what else he could have been.

**JR:** He never ran?

**VP:** I can't remember.

**JR:** Was he, one thing that I guess Frank said, that he might have one hundred meter or something like that, I was just wondering.

**VP:** He wasn't a distance runner. I know because I ran the 880 and he wasn't no 880, I know that. And I ran on a relay team, he wasn't on the relay team. It had to be high jumping.

**JR:** Now was this high jump group good? I mean, I'm sure there were more than him, were they -?

**VP:** Oh, there some a lot better than Ed.

**JR:** So he took pretty much a back seat (*unintelligible phrase*).

**VP:** In athletics, yeah. In athletics, yeah. Like I say (*unintelligible phrase*).

**JR:** Now, all right, with this academic excellence that he had, what, he was in a lot of times contests, or, well he was, and a lot of times fighting for the best grades with a girl named Pearl

May Marden?

**VP:** Pearl Harvey.

**JR:** Pearl Harvey? Now is she still alive, or has she died?

**VP:** She died, yeah. I meant to mention her. They always got along good, they were both on the debating team, they were both, when they had these junior prize speaking class, you know, and all that stuff, they were the leaders. And she was something like Ed, very quiet, very reserved. But she knew what she was doing all the time. Pearl Harvey, I'm glad you brought her up.

**JR:** Now, what was, there's also another fellow, Bernard Goodfellow? He was on the captain of the track team?

**VP:** Bernard Goodfellow.

**JR:** Bernard Goodfellow. Were they exceptionally close, because I know he was on the debate team with Ed, and he was on, you know, different groups with Ed.

**VP:** Well, in fact in those days he was a good student. But he didn't end up that way.

**JR:** Really, what happened to him?

**VP:** Booze got the better of him. Yeah, oh, he was in the service but after that he ended up a drunk.

**JR:** That's too bad.

**VP:** Killed him.

**JR:** So he died pretty young then I take it.

**VP:** He lived forty-two years, yeah.

**JR:** That's too bad, that is a shame. I hate to hear that kind of thing happening. All right, let me just, okay, when, I want to get that one thing about the Navy before I end this. But when, I want to try and get, also get an idea of what Rumford was like during this high school period all around. Now I think Rumford was a relatively booming place, was it not?

**VP:** Yeah, because of the paper mills, yeah.

**JR:** And so most people worked in this paper mill?

**VP:** Almost everybody. Outside of the ones that were in business, you know.

**JR:** Like -

**VP:** People that had stores or businesses, but the mill was the place to earn pretty good money. Just like it is today. Today is even more so. You know, there's some kids down there, at the mill today, down there today for Boise Cascade, can you imagine what they make in one week if they want to put in a few what they call sixteen's, work double shifts. They come out of there with seven, eight, nine hundred dollars a week if they want to put the hours in, work double shifts, overtime.

**JR:** Because they're there.

**VP:** Yeah, imagine working on that big paper machine. They make over twenty dollars an hour. All they do is sit there and watch dials now. If you work ten hours at twenty dollars an hour, that's a day. You could run seven days, you could work a couple of sixteens if you want. That's why a lot of these kids say, well I'm not going to go to school, I'm going to get a job here. The benefits are good, good pension. Some of those guys down there are getting five weeks vacation with pay.

**JR:** So it was like that back then, too?

**VP:** No, it wasn't. The old Oxford (*unintelligible phrase*).

**JR:** What was the old Oxford like?

**VP:** Well, the wage scale was down low like everywhere else. Nowhere near what it is today. If you made twenty-five dollars a week, in those days that was good money. You could live like a king. Today you could make, to live like they did then you'd have to make four or five hundred dollars a week. You wouldn't get any more, you know, everything costs so much today. (*Unintelligible phrase*). But the town was good in those days, it was a regular beehive. On Congress Street, on weekends, Saturday nights. Now you go down there Saturday night, nobody on the street. Don't ask me why, don't ask me what happened. Something.

**JR:** They lost it, I guess.

**VP:** They lost it.

**JR:** Did this, and I take it, on a Friday or Saturday night, if there wasn't a dance, where would you go, what would you do?

**VP:** Oh, there was a dance every Saturday night.

**JR:** Oh, there was.

**VP:** There was enough of those in those days. All you needed was two, three dollars in your

pocket. (*Unintelligible phrase*), one time, we chipped in twenty-five cents for gas, you get five gallons of gas for a dollar, fill the tank in an old Ford, chip in twenty five cents for a half a pint of whiskey, cost you twenty five cents to get into any dance in those days, fifty cents at the most. Today you couldn't do that if you had twenty-five dollars in your pocket, and you're not getting at half the fun. Kids today don't have fun, they don't know how. In those days we had fun, a lot of fun. I wouldn't swap my childhood days for the ones they got today, no way, I wouldn't swap. No sir.

**JR:** All right, so, all right, let's say on a night you didn't go to a dance, then, all right, what -?

**VP:** Like on a Sunday, we'd hang around Congress Street, walk up and down the street and walk up to Falls Hills towards Virginia, stop at a place and buy a half a quart of ice cream, eat ice cream. Used to go down to the post office, sit on the front door, on the steps there in the post office. There was nothing else on Sundays. Saturday nights you either went to the dance or you stayed in town. Hang around the institute, that's the place, see, like a community center. That's all you could do. There was a theater, the Strand Theater. That's even torn down now, that was right across where the fire station was, they even lost that. That used to be packed back in the old days. You lined up outside, you'd think it was Rockefeller Center there, when they go see the Rockettes. Now they're gone, theater's gone even.

**JR:** What did, I don't know, you probably grew up with it and got used to it, what did you think of the pollution, or the (*unintelligible phrase*)?

**VP:** From the Oxford? Didn't bother me a bit, it was my bread and butter. When them smoke stacks stop, there's no money coming in.

**JR:** So that, yeah, so that -

**VP:** Didn't bother me at all. We stood the smell a long time, but they cleaned it up. Ten, fifteen years ago you couldn't stand the stink. Of course we got used to it in town, but people who came in town, they would hold their nose from Dixfield up here. Oh, you could smell it down in Canton, it was so rank.

**JR:** Wow, wow. And the water pollution, too.

**VP:** Oh, that river was really dirty, that river was putrid. You could see it was yellow, down by (*unintelligible word*) there, where the bridge is. That river was just yellow, you could see the chemicals in it. You know what suckers are, that fish there that's, live most anywhere. Even the suckers couldn't live in it. But today they got it pretty well cleaned out. I think they're catching fish in it now.

**JR:** Really, what was the river like before that, I mean when you all were in high school?

**VP:** Really dirty, oh yeah, that's when everybody was dumping everything in the river. The Oxford Paper Company, all their stock and everything was going in the river, all our sewers from

these homes, they all emptied out in that river.

**JR:** Oh, my God.

**VP:** Now you got this new sewage system that goes down to that pollution plant. Back then everything went in the river.

**JR:** Oh my God, so it must have stunk.

**VP:** Well, especially from the mill. Certain days when it was muggy and the ceiling was low, people used to stay inside and shut their windows.

**JR:** Oh geez, that's terrible.

**VP:** Oh yeah, it really was dirty.

**JR:** I guess so.

**VP:** Not now. They done a good job.

**JR:** All right, now, this other thing about the Navy, could you retell that story about Ed and when he was coming back?

**VP:** Well, as near as I can tell, he came home on a furlough. I'm trying to remember, it was around Thanksgiving. He was an ensign in the Navy, he was home on furlough. And that afternoon Ed, his father Steve, my father-in-law Alfred Gagnon, and my brother-in-law Bob Gagnon, they struck out for the Gagnon camp up in Roxbury Pond. Ed would know where that is. They were going to go hunting the next morning. Well that night, one of the worst blizzards we ever had here hit. Now whether they knew what was going on that night or not, I don't know, but, unless they went to bed early to get up early to go hunting at daybreak. You couldn't go hunting before daybreak, see. Well when he got up at daybreak, they didn't go hunting. They were lucky they could even open the door. I think they went out through the window up on top (*unintelligible phrase*).

**JR:** How did, what hap-, how did they get home?

**VP:** Of course they had, most people in those days always had snowshoes kicking around. I remember I think they got on snowshoes and they got to the main road somehow. Well of course, you know, people around here knew that, somebody must have been up in those camps, hunting season, so I imagine some of the sheriffs and all these other people there got these vehicles. Of course in those days they didn't have snowmobiles, couldn't get up in one of those. But they got out after a while. I don't know how long they were up there, but they got out. They had to get out.

**JR:** Now what was Ed like during this period of time?

**VP:** Well, he'd been on snowshoes before. Oh yeah. I used to have a snapshot at home, pretty sure he was on snowshoes, somewhere. Yeah, well he used to go, you know, in the winter time you either snowshoed or you skated. There was no skiing in those days, they didn't have these ski areas in those days. You either went skating on the river or you went snowshoeing.

**JR:** But he had to be back from furlough, didn't he?

**VP:** Well, he had to be back at a certain time I suppose, sure. I don't even remember where he came from.

**JR:** But he was worried about getting back, wasn't he?

**VP:** Yeah, he was worried. He had to get back to town some way. It's twelve miles up on the hills there, from Rumford.

**JR:** There's one other thing I just brought to mind when you said that thing about the skating and all that. There's a winter carnival that you all had, that happened in the, I don't know how it was even now, but what was it like then, what was it -?

**VP:** That was the biggest carnival I think on the east coast in those days.

**JR:** Now what would happen here, what would the town do?

**VP:** Oh, they'd start six months ahead of time, start working up a program. They worked it up to, they had a big ski jump, one of the biggest around, they had a big skating rink. They'd invite all the top skiers in those days, class A, B, and C. They'd all come. And the town would get ready a long time before that to get things lined up. They had committees for different things, they had a big carnival ball, they had a big carnival contest, who's going to be the queen of the carnival.

**JR:** How would you become queen of the carnival?

**VP:** Well, whoever wanted to run for it. Probably be five or six local girls running for it. And they had to go out and sell tickets, carnival tickets for a buck. Whoever sold the most tickets was the carnival queen. So they'd go out and have suppers and run dances to raise money to buy the tickets. Anything to sell tickets. Whoever sold the most tickets -

**JR:** Was the carnival queen.

**VP:** So every girl had a group behind her, had a different club or a different bunch behind her. They'd run parties or suppers and you name it, to raise money to buy up a dollar ticket. And whoever sold them, just before carnival night, there, around seven o'clock they'd gather up at the old skating rink, which is gone now, they had a big arch made out of ice blocks and in those ice blocks was colored lights, and the throne was in there. So whoever won, she was escorted to that

throne on that colored ice.

**JR:** That's elaborate, my God.

**VP:** And from there they'd have a torchlight parade from the skating rink down Congress Street to the city hall, that's where the carnival ball was held. She was ridden down in a horse drawn carriage, or probably in those days it was a sleigh. I can remember that, I can remember that, I used to go to those dances.

**JR:** Then what would happen after that?

**VP:** Well, Christ, they'd come up from Lewiston, Portland, the town was loaded, the restaurants were full, the hotels, you couldn't find a room, they put up these contestants in private homes. They had to get homes all over town to put up certain people for so many nights. Sunday morning, of course I was living on Railroad Street at that time; that was before we lost our homes there. The railroad station used to come up there by the Oxford Paper Company. They'd run a special train from Portland to Lewiston to Rumford. And that special train would pull in about ten o'clock Sunday morning, the ski jumping was at one o'clock in the afternoon, they'd all come up to watch the ski jumping mainly. That train would pull in, and you'd see them come off that train, drunk, they'd fall off the train. Double engines in those days, double steam engines, which you don't even have them. Have you ever seen the steam engine?

**JR:** No.

**VP:** You don't know what you, you've missed something. That smoke coming out of that stack there. A special train. They're coming up for this carnival. They were drunk before they got here, and some of them didn't even see the ski jump.

**JR:** This is an incredibly big affair.

**VP:** It was a big affair, one of the biggest things in the state at that time. State or I'd say, even New England. They didn't have no Sugarloaf. They would go Saddleback or, those places hadn't even started yet. Rumford and Berlin New Hampshire, that was the ski areas, those carnivals. Not a ski area, carnival. Always good times.

**JR:** It was just a good time when people would get together like, now would this go for a weekend, a week?

**VP:** Oh, we used to start Friday night right through until Sunday night. They'd have snowshoe races, ski races, cross country races, just like the skating. But the ski jumping was a big thing, that was a big thing. They'd get five thousand people in the ski jump to watch it.

**JR:** And people would pay to go see it.

**VP:** You had to have that dollar ticket, yeah, you had to have that dollar ticket.

**JR:** Okay, well, I think, yeah, I have just one more question, it's about Ed, that I wanted to kind of finish off with. And maybe you can, you know, think of something. But I was just wondering when Ed, when you graduated with Ed, was there any, did you see this political figure evolve? I mean, did you think, oh, he's going to, I mean you knew he was going to go somewhere but did you know he was going to go this far?

**VP:** No, I didn't know what he was going to do, but I knew he was going to do something. I don't think he knew himself in high school that he was going to be a politician. I'll bet he didn't know then. I just wonder if he did know in high school what he was going to take up. Even when he went to Bates, he took up and he became a lawyer.

*End of Tape 1  
Tape 2, Side A*

**VP:** And from there he went into politics. But I often wondered if he had politics in the back of his mind before he even started to take up law. Maybe he did, I don't know. But I always said, he's going to go places. He did.

**JR:** And he did, yeah. So you weren't that surprised when he (*unintelligible phrase*)?

**VP:** Oh, no, I wasn't surprised. No, nothing surprised me, anything he did didn't surprise me one bit.

**JR:** All right, thank you very much.

*End of Interview*