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Interview with Richard Sampson by Meredith Gethin-Jones and Marisa Burnham-Besstor

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Sampson, Richard

Interviewer

Gethin-Jones, Meredith
Burnham-Besstor Marisa

Date

February 14, 1999

Place

Lewiston, Maine

ID Number

MOH 063

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Biographical Note

Richard W. Sampson was born in Newton, Massachusetts, to Winsor and Pauline Sampson. He attended Bowdoin College and graduated as a math major. After graduation, he studied meteorology at MIT and the University of Illinois and got a commission in the Air Force as a meteorologist. In 1952, he got a job teaching mathematics at Bates College. He married Jean Sampson, the founder of the Catalyst Organization, a group that seeks to expand opportunities for women in business, education and other fields. She was also active in the Maine Civil Liberties Union (MCLU) and other social and political action groups. Because of those connections, Richard and Jean Sampson became close personally to Edmund S. Muskie, Frank Coffin and other major Maine political players.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: Sampson family history; his education; Jean Sampson; political affiliations; Sampson's parents' influences; family and politics; Catalyst; University of Maine system; Ed Muskie; political changes in Maine; Jean Sampson's involvement in the

Maine Civil Liberties Union; Shepard Lee; the American Civil Liberties Union; the first meeting of Richard and Jean Sampson; Jean Sampson's political history; Louis Scolnik; social progress; Frank and Ruth Coffin; and political discussions with Muskie.

Indexed Names

Brown, Francis
Clinton, Bill, 1946-
Coffin, Frank Morey
Coffin, Ruth Ulrich
Cox, Peter
Donovan, John C.
Hill, Warren
Isaacson, Irving
Isaacson, Judith Magyar, 1925-
Lee, Shep
Longley, James, Sr.
Marshall, Thurgood
Muskie, Edmund S., 1914-1996
Muskie, Jane Gray
Nicoll, Don
Nixon, Richard M. (Richard Milhous), 1913-1994
Reed, John
Roosevelt, Eleanor, 1884-1962
Sampson, Jean Byers
Schwartz, Felice N.
Scolnik, Louis
Wessell, Nils
White, Walter

Transcript

MG: We're here with Richard Sampson. And Meredith Gethin-Jones and Marisa Burnham Bestor are here. And we are at Richard Sampson's residence on February 14th, 1999. Mr. Sampson, could you please spell your full name?

Richard Sampson: R-I-C-H-A-R-D. Want my middle name, too? W, Sampson, S-A-M-P-S-O-N.

MG: Thank you. Mr. Sampson, could you tell us a little bit about your childhood and your growing up?

RS: I don't think I ever grew up. I was brought up in a very happy home in Newton, Mass. I have a twin sister and a brother. My twin sister and I are very close. She lives on an island,

Drake's Island near Ogunquit., So as a kid we had a lot of good times together. So then I went to high school and a math teacher fell in love with me and he took care of me. And he, took me in Boston so we could look at some of the architectural sights in Boston, and he wanted me to go to either Bowdoin or Wesleyan. And he taught at Bowdoin so that's where I went to school.

MBINT: What was his name?

RS: Mergandahl.

MBINT: How do you spell that?

RS: M-E-R-G-A-N-D-A-H-L.

MBINT: Has, is he, has . . .?

RS: He's long since dead.

MBINT: How long was he a professor at Bowdoin?

RS: I can't tell you. Mostly summer school.

MBINT: How were you connected to him, since you were only a high school student?

RS: Well, he was my high school teacher. And I was pretty good at math in high school and he took an interest in me, so he wanted me to go to some respectable college. I wanted to go to Bowdoin anyway, it's near the oceans. So I was a math major there.

MGINT: What sorts of things were you involved in there?

RS: Where?

MGINT: At Bowdoin?

RS: Well, I went there during the 1940s, in 1943, during the World War days. So I went there summers and graduated in a couple of years as a math major. Then I went to, studied meteorology in the Air Force at MIT and got transferred to the University of Illinois, and had a commission in the Air Force as a meteorologist. So. What else?

MGINT: Were you involved in politics in high school or college?

RS: No, not really.

MGINT: When did you become involved in politics?

RS: I never really became involved. I was always interested in the Democratic primaries here in Maine, and I knew most all the candidates. And plus of course my sister, my wife was

campaign manager for Muskie when he was running for governor. And Frank Coffin, he was running for governor and didn't make it, but, unfortunately. So my wife was very busy with politics. She's an ardent Democrat and luckily I am, too, so. I followed her political career very closely.

MGINT: Can you tell me how, how did you and her meet, and how did she first introduce you to politics? Or was she involved . . . ?

RS: What's your question?

MGINT: Was she involved in politics before she met you?

RS: No.

MGINT: No? So when did she become involved in politics?

RS: Oh, she got involved with civil liberties long before she got involved with politics. And, she graduated from Smith and had a couple of wonderful professors there. And while she was at Smith she spent a lot of time reading for a woman who was shut -in, elderly woman, so she read many, many good books to this woman. So between the professors and this reading, it shaped her life. And she, at age of twenty-one, she wrote this remarkable book on Negro troops in WWII.

MBINT: A Study of the Negro in Military Service?

RS: Yup. And she was twenty-one, I guess, when she did that. It's a classic reference book. Doris Kearns Goodwin has used it in her book, No Ordinary Time. So, she got this interest in civil liberties, really with (*unintelligible word*) interest in the Black movement. Her mentor was Eleanor Roosevelt, and Thurgood Marshall. So she became tremendously interested in the plight of Negroes in this country. And there was a, well, it was when it was, when she was really very active in the Black movement, and of course the Blacks were admitted to the military service then, the Air Force, and an Air Force general in the 1940s. No, she was extremely important in the effort for getting civil rights for Blacks in this country.

MBINT: When did she start to become involved with that? At what time frame?

RS: When she was twenty -one, and she'd just graduated from Smith really. She had a job, her first job was with the NAACP. She'd travel around the country giving talks to all kinds of people on civil rights. This was the 1940s, 1946.

MGINT: Do you know anyone who she was involved with in the NAACP?

RS: Thurgood Marshall.

MGINT: Anyone else?

RS: Walter White.

MGINT: How was she involved with these people?

RS: Well, Walter White was head of the NAACP those years, 1945, 1950. And Thurgood Marshall who was recently, you know he's (*unintelligible word*) on the Supreme Court? So they knew each other quite well. And she worked for the NAACP. She'd go in and out of the office and he'd be there, and see each other.

MBINT: Were th-, did they get to know each other particularly well, or . . .?

RS: Yes, he came here and visited here once.

MBINT: What is he like?

RS: What was he like?

MBINT: Yeah.

RS: Well, he was just a very gentle, wonderful What can I say? Ardent liberal, ardent Democrat. And if you're in this house you have to be a Democrat if you expect to get any results.

MGINT: Oh, we're both Democrats.

RS: Okay.

MGINT: Have you always been a Democrat?

RS: Always.

MGINT: Were your parents both Democrats as well?

RS: No, one was and one wasn't.

MBINT: What sort of political beliefs were instilled in you as a child, through your parents, and how did their views . . .?

RS: Well, mostly a racial tolerance and religious tolerance. I had friends in all kinds of people, nationalities.

MBINT: So your parents were very accepting?

RS: Yup.

MGINT: I'm sorry, what were your parents' names?

RS: How far back do you want to go?

MBINT: Just your immediate parents.

RS: Winsor Sampson was my father, W-I-N-S-O-R. You got that down there anyway? Ooh, Christ. And Pauline Sampson. My father was a, played a violin as a hobby.

MGINT: Is that how you got involved in music?

RS: No, not yet. Then the, my mother was a, could have been a concert pianist but she, she made a big mistake. She gave up piano for bringing up three kids. She studied in Europe and played Chopin (*unintelligible phrase*) beautifully and graduated from Lincoln Conservatory. And my grandmother graduated from the Lincoln Conservatory. And I'm about ninety-nine percent music.

MGINT: Did she teach you how to play the piano?

RS: No, but I can play the piano. I can't read, but I can play the piano.

MGINT: Oh really? That's interesting. Play by ear?

RS: What?

MGINT: You play by just hearing?

RS: Yup. My son and I, my son is forty -seven or eight, he's a beautiful pianist. So every (*unintelligible word -- someone sneezes*), many Saturday nights we play in the Left Bank Cafe in Blue Hill, Maine, we play piano together. It's such fun.

MBINT: Were your brothers and sisters, did they become at all involved in civil liberties or . . . ?

RS: No, not my brother. He's a, he's kind of a nice guy but we don't have much in common.

MBINT: Really? What was his name?

RS: David. He's older than I am.

MBINT: You only had one sibling?

RS: He?

MGINT: No, he has a twin sister.

MBINT: Oh, you had a twin sister?

RS: I *have* a twin sister.

MBINT: What's her name?

RS: Eleanor Sampson.

MGINT: Is she involved in politics?

RS: Not to the extent that I have been, but, no, but she's, she contributes a great deal of time and money to the Civil Liberties Union.

MGINT: Can you tell us a little bit about that?

RS: She's a good musician, too.

MGINT: Can you tell us a little bit about the Civil Liberties Union?

RS: How much time do you have?

MGINT: As much time as you care to give. We won't keep you more than, more than two hours.

RS: Well, she was, what do you want to know? About the Civil Liberties Union, or what her role was with it?

MBINT: Over all look at the function of the Civil Liberties Union, what their goal . . . ?

RS: Well, there are two things to consider this, the American Civil Liberties Union, and their headquarters is in New York, and they control all the funds for all the different groups like Maine Civil Liberties, Mississippi Civil Liberties, California Civil Liberties Union, state affiliates of the Civil Liberties Union. So there's a central headquarters, and they have their own fleet of lawyers. And those ACLU lawyers they, they adjudicate cases before the Supreme Court, and other places too, on civil liberties. Which means, if you're a Nazi supporter in Wisconsin and you want to organize a parade for the Nazi movement, you can, you're allowed to do it. But in this town of Skokie, people didn't want the, these Nazi sympathizers to parade down the street., So the Civil Liberties Union got into the act and said, "They have the, that group has just as much right as anybody else to parade in the streets".

MBINT: Where was this?

RS: In Skokie, Wisconsin [*sic* Illinois] I think it was.

MBINT: What year?

RS: I don't remember.

MBINT: Was it a long time ago, then?

RS: No, it wasn't a long time ago. My guess is probably, I hate to say, I really don't dare say. It's just a well-known case.

MGINT: So what is the function of the Maine Civil Liberties Union, the primary function?

RS: I have so much literature on this. It's main function is to protect the civil liberties of citizens of the state. And that means they, they protect the right of students in high schools, for example, to get any book that they want. They also don't like to have the public school librarians clear out what kind of books they don't want. So the MCLU, Maine Civil Liberties Union, has taken these cases to court, and they've been very successful in supporting freedom of literature and freedom of the press. So, they're just like watchdogs. They also, in Maine they protect the rights of prisoners in this state.

MGINT: How interesting.

RS: Yup, and they protect the rights of people who don't have enough money to pay for legal funds. Maine Civil Liberties Union has its own legal staff, and they work *pro bono*, free, for indigent people. It's just that, they work on all kinds of discrimination in restaurants. They protect people from brutality, police brutality, like in Portland recently. It's just a wonderful group.

MBINT: What attracted your wife to become so involved?

RS: Well, her whole history has been caring for underdogs, people who don't have rights. They're guaranteed rights under the Bill of Rights, but they're not, they don't practice it. There's too much discrimination in this country.

MGINT: When did she first join the Maine Civil Liberties Union?

RS: She was on the national board for years, in New York. She was one of the, she represented the State of Maine on the national board in New York.

MBINT: What sort of responsibilities did that entail?

RS: Oh, God, it's just unbelievable. Is that clear? It's unbelievable what the national ACLU does. It worries about all kinds of legal battles that Blacks have in this country, that women have, that prisoners have. Prisoners are denied certain rights. Polling jurisdictions, voting jurisdictions. There's just so many, I can't even tell you about them. Problems in public schools, dress codes in public schools.

MBINT: What were her major issues, that she was most interested in?

RS: She was most interested in generalization of civil liberties,. . .

MGINT: Your wife was . . . ?

RS: . . . that means legal rights, women's rights. I haven't even begun to tell you what she did on that score. You'll have to just refresh me, okay?

MGINT: I have a question . . .

RS: What was I trying to answer?

MGINT: You were talking about what she did specifically, what her main focus was with civil liberties, and you said women's rights.

RS: Yup, especially women's rights. Discrimination against women.

MGINT: So was she pleased when Bates started the women's studies program?

RS: No.

MGINT: No?

RS: I don't think so.

MBINT: What exactly, you said that she was incredibly involved in the women's rights movement.

RS: She was totally involved in it.

MBINT: Could you elaborate on some of the things that she did?

RS: She and a woman friend who, named [Felice N.] Ducky Schwartz . . .

MBINT: Ducky? How do you spell that?

RS: D-U-C-K-Y.

MGINT: Schwartz?

RS: Swatz [*sic* Schwartz].

MGINT: Spelled?

RS: S-W-A-T-Z [*sic* Schwartz], I think it is. Schwartz. Who died a couple years ago, died the same year Jean died. So these two people, (and she's from New York, this other woman), and

Jean, right here, had her office upstairs, and they founded this organization called Career¹.

MBINT: Career?

RS: Yeah. And if you took the time to go upstairs you could get a pamphlet on what they did. I'll show it to you;, you have to just make a note of that. So they founded this wonderful organization, and it was involved with enabling women whose children were more or less grown up, out of high school for example, and enable these women to go to the best schools in the country, and all the expenses were paid. And if they were college graduates, they'd send them to graduate school. And it was just a, just an amazingly successful organization. And this group that Jean was on the board, she was one of the founders of it, she got some tremendously interesting people into this Catalyst group, it's called Catalyst, and she had presidents of many well known colleges, educators.

MGINT: Can you name some of them?

RS: Well, there's was a guy from Smith, I don't remember his name. He's died long ago. I don't remember his name. Had Warren Hill from the University of Maine, a guy from Cornell, fellow from Harvard, Brown. Doesn't really make much difference who they are, because I don't remember all their names. And Muskie was on the board;, Frank Coffin. So this group called Catalyst had about twenty people interested in this whole education business, and they had relations with the graduate schools like Vassar and Dartmouth and Smith. And they just had tremendous opportunities for these women to go back to school, and they did it. And so right this minute, they have a huge organization in New York City, maybe, I don't know how many people are on their staff right now. It's, it's just a growing concern.

MGINT: And this is something that your wife established?

RS: Yup.

MGINT: Fabulous.

RS: Well, she and this other woman, they were partners.

MGINT: Do you know how Ed Muskie got involved in that?

RS: No.

MGINT: Or Frank Coffin?

RS: Well, they got involved, Frank really wasn't involved with Catalyst, but he was there on the sideline. Muskie, oh, it's just too complicated to tell you, because her role in education overlapped most of this stuff we're talking about. She was chairman of the board of trustees of

¹ Actually, **Catalyst**; see further discussion below.

the University of Maine system. Now that's not small-time, because there are seven universities in the university system, right? Farmington, and . . .

MBINT: Southern Maine.

RS: . . . Southern Maine, Presque Isle, Augusta . . .

MBINT: Orono.

RS: . . . and Orono, yeah. There are seven of them. So she was chairman of the board. Because of that, she got involved with politicians, and Muskie was governor then; he was a good, excellent governor. Unfortunately, the guy who really wasn't a good governor was James B. Longley. He was disastrous.

MBINT: He was right before or right after Muskie? I've heard his name before.

RS: You certainly have. Probably after.

MBINT: Why would you say he was so horrible?

RS: I wouldn't say that. I would just say he was. I'm very biased.

MBINT: What . . . ?

RS: Well, he was, when he got to be governor as an independent, he wanted to streamline, whatever that meant, the budget on the university system, the whole system. And she was chairman of the board. So he wanted each one of these trustees to resign. So he sent out these papers for them to sign, papers of resignation, and luckily they had staggered terms. So Jean sent him a letter saying no one on this board wants to resign because of you, or something like that. And so they got some, the board got some sort of an award for this, Michael Jordan Award.

Oh, there was also another case, University of Maine, the, whoever was the president of it, wanted to block a meeting of gay rights people. Now, this is probably twenty years ago. The gay rights group wanted to have a convention at Orono. So the president refused to let these guys put on a convention. So the board, with Jean, said they got to do it. So they did. They held their convention. And as a result of this the board, through Jean, got an award for, Meiklejohn Award for, how can I say?

MGINT: Was this guy a Republican or a Democrat?

RS: Who?

MGINT: Longley.

RS: He was an independent. Needless to say, he wasn't reelected.

MGINT: What was it like being a Democrat in Maine before Muskie was governor, and the state began to change its . . .?

RS: Well, it was quite desolate for the Democrats.

MGINT: Right, that's what I was thinking. It was almost all Republican, and you were a Democrat, as was your wife. What was that like?

RS: Well, we just kept going for what we thought was important, and recognized Muskie for what he was. So, just keep fighting.

MBINT: What was your relationship like with Frank Coffin? How did that develop? How did you know him?

RS: Oh, I've known Frank since I came to Maine, that was 1952. He and his wife and I just were extremely close friends.

MBINT: How did you meet him?

RS: Well, we liked to, oh, I think Jean was quite active in his campaign for governor.

MBINT: What year was that?

RS: I don't remember.

MGINT: Was that, wasn't she his research director?

RS: Uh-huh.

MGINT: In 1960.

RS: Yeah, she was the education research director for his campaign. And so we got to know him, and I got to know him. And he and his wife and Jean and I, we cruised up and down the Maine coast several times together. We're just extremely close friends.

MGINT: What was he like as a person?

RS: He's the most gentle, kindly, creative man in the world. I mean, he is an exemplary man. When he didn't get to be elec-, when he didn't win the governorship then he was a, he ran for Congress and got elected to Congress in Washington. And then I guess shortly thereafter he was appointed on the Circuit Court of Appeals, the First Circuit here in Boston, as a judge. And, he's just a remarkable man. Creative painter, sculptor, brilliant, one of the most famous of all Bates graduates.

MGINT: What was he like as a political figure?

RS: Oh, he was completely liberal. Very caring guy. Perfect. Perfect.

INTMB: What was his campaign for governor like?

RS: Well, it was sort of a, it was a discouraging campaign. He went around and spoke French to all the people. And he ran against John Reed, who for me was a lackluster guy. Well, he was very erudite, Frank was very erudite. And I think he somehow thinks he (*unintelligible word*) talked over the people's heads.

MBINT: When you say he spoke French, do you mean to the Franco population in Maine?

RS: Yeah, when he, if he were campaigning, he'd speak French down in Lewiston, in the Common (*unintelligible word*) or something like that. Yeah. Brilliant, he's just a brilliant man. He is brilliant, is that clear? But he's a decent guy, too. I'd say he's unusually capable, and I count him as one of my best friends.

MBINT: Don always speaks very highly of him, too.

RS: Don who?

MBINT: Don Nicoll.

RS: Oh yeah.

MBINT: He works on the oral history project also.

RS: I guess Don knows me.

MGINT: Were you an active participant in his campaign?

RS: No.

MGINT: But your wife was.

RS: Uh-huh.

MGINT: What did she say about it? Did, were there . . . ?

RS: About what?

MGINT: About his campaign?

RS: As governor? For governor?

MGINT: Yes.

RS: She was absolutely broken hearted that he didn't get it, b. Because she thought that . . .

MGINT: What were some of his main issues?

RS: Just what any good Democrat would want. Main issues. Money for education, support for public school teachers, money for, just support anything you would think that a Democrat would think of. She was very upset that he didn't win, I'll tell you that.

MBINT: What was Reed like as a person? His competitor?

RS: He was probably a nice guy.

MGINT: Probably?.

RS: He was a nice guy. I just, it's, completely lackluster.

MGINT: Now, your wife was an active member of the Maine Democratic Party over all, right?

RS: Yup.

MGINT: Were you also?

RS: Well, I was active. I wasn't active, I went to some of the primaries, but I, you know, I might have sealed some envelopes.

MGINT: Were either of you associated with Ed Muskie or Ed Muskie's friends through this?

RS: Oh yes. We were very good friends with Muskie.

MBINT: How did you meet him?

RS: Through this political process. We had friends who were . . .

MGINT: Specifically?

RS: Hmm?

MGINT: To do with what issues? How did, what sort of political issues did you and Ed Muskie have in common?

RS: Well, we were ardent Democrats. And Jean and I knew Muskie and his wife Jane. So, I can't really answer that question.

MBINT: Okay. As far as your relationship with Muskie, what was he like to meet? What was he like to know?

RS: What was he what?

MBINT: What was he like to meet, what was he like to know as a person?

MGINT: What was his personality?

RS: Well, you certainly have talked to Don Nicoll about this, haven't you?

MBINT: That's why it always gets an interesting answer.

RS: Because Don was very involved with Ed Muskie, much more so than I was.

MBINT: What were your . . . ?

RS: But he was just a very expansive guy, very caring guy, a tremendously good sense of humor. He knew what was right, and he knew what was wrong; that's why he was such a good senator. It's too bad he didn't get to be President. He was shot down in New Hampshire.

MBINT: What was the reaction of Maine people about what happened in New Hampshire?

RS: Well, they were very sad. Very sad. Had not much use for the local newspaper.

MBINT: The, how did most Mainers in this area feel about Nixon in general? You know, just about what happened with that?

RS: Well, I don't remember what happened. My guess is that Nixon didn't carry the state. If I'm a measure of it, they didn't think much of Nixon. I'm really not that bad, I'm not a terrible Republican hater, but.

IMGNT: You said that Maine was very, Maine changed a lot as opposed . . .

RS: Me?

MGINT: No, Maine, the state, from going Republican to Democrat. How did, what sorts of things changed and what made that obvious?

RS: Probably better representation of different parties, because the Republicans had a stronghold on the state legislature.

MGINT: Can you tell us a little bit about that, and some of the changes that occurred?

RS: Well, I would say this:, that the legislature now is much more responsive to organizations like the Maine Civil Liberties Union. They have, the legislature has much more, their ears to human civil rights, civil liberties than they ever did during, during some of those Republican days. I think I'm a little biased.

MBINT: What was the struggle like for your wife and her involvement with the Civil Liberties Union before the Democrats got a stronger hold on the state?

MGINT: Before 1954?

RS: Well, she was very involved with working in this state for people who were dropouts in high school, and it's called Career Opportunities, and this is a Maine organization. And she was director of this, and they, this group, was sponsored by the state, of which she was the director. She recruited instructors for this program, and the students were people who had dropped out of high school. And they did, this organization called Career Opportunities, they practically, well, they did their best to give teaching jobs to these people. And I know some of them right now in this community who are teachers in the public schools, and without this they never would have survived. So it encouraged them to go back to school, tuition paid. So she had this feeling with the rights of people to teach and work. So it sort of just fell in to, this Maine Civil Liberties Union was founded about thirty years ago.

MGINT: Now, she was executive director from 1977 to '82. What were, her same, well, was she involved in the same sorts of things, or did her perspective change at all, or her focus?

RS: No, her perspective did not change. They had, the Maine Civil Liberties Union had a terrible time hanging on to a director. And we were at a dinner once with some friends of ours, Shepard Lee was there. And she, of course she'd always supported the Maine Civil Liberties Union, both of us had been very loyal to that group. But anyway, they, their director ran off with some money, and so he or she was fired. Then they got another one to come in to the office in Portland, and she couldn't stand the job, just, everything was helter-skelter. She lasted for about two weeks I guess, not much. So then Shepard Lee asked Jean, "Hey Jean, why don't you be director until they get things settled down?" So she said, "Okay." So she became director and stayed there for five or six years, and pulled the whole damn thing together beautifully. It's been very strong ever since. They have wonderful legal staff, MCLU does (*unintelligible phrase*).

MBINT: What was it like beforehand, and how did she change it?

RS: Didn't exist before that. It's only been in existence for thirty years.

MGINT: Who was Shepard Lee?

RS: He's a very public-spirited automobile dealer.

MGINT: And you knew him through the Civil Liberties Union?

RS: No, I've known him for years, we've been close friends. Used to live right near us. Our kids grew up together. Shepard and I are about as close as you can get.

MGINT: Yeah, Don mentioned his name. He asked me to ask a little bit about that, and his political standing.

MBINT: Is Shep still living?

RS: Oh yeah, yup. I see him quite frequently.

MGINT: What's all your . . .?

MBINT: What was your political relationship with him?

RS: We were just very close friends. Ardent Democrats, and just close friends. I know his family extremely well;, still do.

MGINT: Did you work towards certain causes together? Certain civil rights causes?

RS: No, we were just ardent supporters of the Maine Civil Liberties Union, but he was much more active.

MGINT: How was he more active?

RS: Well, I think he was on the board of the Maine Civil Liberties Union.

MGINT: Did he ever talk to you about the sorts of things that he did?

RS: Oh, yes.

MGINT: What did he do?

RS: He talked about many things that he did, or does.

MGINT: What were some of those things?

RS: That he talked about, that he did? I don't know. I can't tell you.

MGINT: Okay.

MB: You said that before your wife became director, the Civil Liberties Union was almost nonexistent. How did she pull that together, how did she . . .?

RS: Well, they had approximately one or two people on the staff, and letters keep coming in from people who were maltreated, and they had no one to take care of the incoming mail, literally. And so Jean tried to get some of these interns from the University of Maine Law School, needed volunteer work, and handle some of these cases. And the Pine Tree Legal Association provided lawyers. So, before Jean's time it was a pretty helter-skelter place. They just couldn't keep up with all the demands. And, in Augusta for example, now they have a, they have a very good lobbyist there in Augusta for legislation.

MBINT: We need to switch tapes.

MGINT: Okay, can we just stop just for a moment?

End of Side One

Side Two

RS: Well, as a result of Jean's being a director of the Civil Liberties Union, she was able to get interns, legal interns to help out some of the problems. Also, they had a staff of lawyers who were doing *pro bono* work. And they hired a public relations person to be a lobbyist in Augusta.

MGINT: Do you know who that was?

RS: I don't remember her name.

MBINT: Was the funding there all along? It just hadn't been organized properly?

RS: The funding was not there all the time. When Jean got there, there was, they had few very significant benefactors, people who had a great deal of money. So, they're, the Maine Civil Liberties Union has a foundation whereby you can give money and that money is, some of it, (*unintelligible word*) deductible from income taxes and . . . (*unintelligible word*). And there's another branch of, where you invest money for different purposes. And then of course the MCLU gets some money from the national organization, but there's some miserable, miserably poor Civil Liberties Union in this country. I mean, they are miserably poor, like Mississippi for example. And they just have to get, they have to get money from the national organization. So Jean was on the board in New York for the ACLU, American Civil Liberties Union. And they just spent years trying to decide how the funds of the ACLU were being distributed to the different affiliates.

MBINT: Would Maine get a lot of funding from them?

RS: No. I don't know what they got. It's nothing compared to what these other states got.

MGINT: You described your wife as an "ardent Democrat".

RS: That's an understatement.

MGINT: Could you just tell me a little bit about how she was raised and how she became such an ardent Democrat, for lack of better words?

RS: Such a caring Democrat.

MGINT: Okay. What was her childhood like?

RS: Well, she was very bright, and she had a knack for memorizing words of popular pieces. She was very bright. And, she was, had a lot of boyfriends. She was very popular, played tennis in high school, went to dances and, she was just a very popular girl. But she always did well in

school. So, that's the . . . (*referring to noise*).

MBINT: Heater?

RS: Something like that. Water going through the pipes.

MGINT: Were her parents political activists?

RS: No, they weren't. They were definitely not, no. She grew up a Catholic, but she saw the light. And, her parents didn't push it at all, but she left the church in high school days.

MBINT: I gather you're not religious?

RS: Oh, Jesus, ardent atheist until our death.

MBINT: Did you share that?

RS: Uh-huh.

MBINT: Were your parents religious?

RS: Well, they were in a sort of average way. Her parents were, too. Her mother was Catholic. So Jean, when she went to Smith, she just saw other things more important and she couldn't believe in the tenets of the Christian church at all, so she It's hard for me to say.

MGINT: What kind of community did she grow up in?

RS: She had a Catholic boyfriend in high school. He said, "Look, you're either going to be, going to marry me as a Catholic or not." So she said, "Well, so long." Took me instead.

MBINT: How did you meet?

RS: I told so many people this. How did we meet? It's not very exciting. I met her, I met her at a dance, I guess over at Amherst. This is years ago, when I was a student at Bowdoin. And we, I was never very interested in women, although they had a woman down in South America who'd want to marry me, but that's because I was an American citizen. That's the end of that. So we, I don't know, I had a I guess I was a sophomore or something like that at Bowdoin. I had, I'd asked a woman that I'd known to come for a date to this dance.

MGINT: This is when Bowdoin was all male?

RS: Oh yeah, helloh yes, yes. So this girlfriend of mine came to this party, weekend party. And so I met her at the train station and that was the last I saw of her. Somebody snatched her away from me. Well I got quite upset and I got on my bicycle (*unintelligible word*) no cars and rode down to the ocean where I had an old beat-up boat with some friends, up on the marsh. And we proceeded to have a good time on the boat, but then I got tired of that, and so came back

to the Bowdoin campus, and there was a dance there. So I went to this dance and lo and behold, there was Jean. And so, I went up to her. I said, "Can I dance with you?" And she says, "God, thank God you came because I can't stand this guy that I'm with." So we started to go together and then (*unintelligible word*), and . . . and we were together during the war, when I was in South America. I'd fly up to Boston or New York, Washington, to be with her, when she worked in New York. So.

MBINT: And then you guys kind of developed your political beliefs together?

RS: Yup, yup.

MBINT: When did you move to Maine?

RS: Nineteen fifty-two.

MBINT: Why did you?

RS: Because I taught at Bates.

MBINT: Oh, you got a job?

RS: I got a job.

MBINT: Was, did she have a career outside of the Civil Liberties work that she was doing?

MGINT: And all her volunteer work?

RS: Well, she was in this Catalyst movement I told you about, and this is still going very strong. And I have to show you that brochure.

MGINT: The Career?

RS: Yup, well, it's Catalyst, it's called. And then she was, she was a trustee to Bowdoin College for twenty years, and she was the second woman on the board of trustees at Bowdoin.

MGINT: Interesting.

RS: Yeah, it was quite remarkable. Of course, because here I was, a Bowdoin graduate, so. At least (*Unintelligible phrase*), my sons didn't go to Bowdoin.

MBINT: Where'd they go?

RS: One went to Oberlin, which is a wonderful school.

MBINT: First school to admit Blacks and women.

RS: Well, Bates founded itself on the same principles as Oberlin.

MGINT: Really?

RS: Yeah. Non-denominational, coed, no fraternities. Oberlin's a beautiful school.

MBINT: Where did your other son go?

RS: Wesleyan. He was a music major.

MBINT: We're both from Connecticut.

RS: Well, Wesleyan's got a good musicology department, ethnic music. One of my sons died just last year.

MGINT: Sorry.

RS: Life.

MGINT: You said that your, your wife sounds like an absolutely phenomenal woman. No, seriously, in respect to, you know, her Bowdoin trustee work and everything else. What kind of community did she grow up in, and how did she develop such strong beliefs and how did she become so . . . ?

RS: Well, she got, a couple years ago she got a Roger Baldwin Award from the MCLU. And Lou Scolnik, who was the first president of the Maine Civil Liberties Union is a judge, was, he's in Lewiston;, he was the first president of the MCLU. So, anyway, (*unintelligible word*) what was I talking about?

MGINT: How she became such a strong . . .

RS: (*Unintelligible phrase*), I've already implied that. What happened was that I was asked to give a talk at the Maine Civil Liberties Board Meeting just last year on her behalf, and so Lou Scolnik and I agreed what we'd talk about. And he talked about mainly what she had done in her life. So when my turn came I told the board that I was going to talk on what, what affected Jean to be such a responsible woman. So I devoted my short talk to this, these things, and one was the Smith College experience, the couple of really remarkable professors, and then reading to this recluse of good works by Henry James and Virginia Woolf. And, so Jean had a tremendous background, and this all strengthened her character.

So, as a result of the Smith College days, she immediately started working for the NAACP; just wanted to do it. And there was a lot of opposition when she wrote the history of the Negro troops because the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the Black newspaper back there in '47 or so, they wrote this article about this lily-white, pretty, pert, white girl who the NAACP, via the Department of Washington, Department of Defense in Washington, asked her to write the history of the Negro troops. She's white, and what did she know about the Blacks in the service? So there was quite

a bit of opposition to Jean, because the Department of Defense in Washington wanted her to write this. So, she did, did a lot of, tremendous amount of research on the Black Movement in the service.

INTMG: Was she involved with anyone else during this period of, that she did research? Did she research with anyone else? Or was it independent work?

RS: Also it was with various Black officers in Washington in the Department of Defense.

MGINT: Do you know who some of those people were?

RS: Uh-huh, can't tell you right now, but, I can't really remember their names. B.O. Davis was one of the generals, Benjamin Davis. So, she was just fired up on this. She just interviewed many, many people. Eleanor Roosevelt was her favorite of all favorite people.

MGINT: She interviewed her personally?

RS: Oh, yes, yeah. I don't know. (*Unintelligible phrase*), I assess that she did.

MBINT: Who was Louis Scolnik? You mentioned him.

RS: He's very much alive. He's a retired judge from the Maine Supreme Court.

MGINT: Are you friends with him?

RS: He's one of my closest friends, yup.

MGINT: What is he like?

RS: Oh, he's a very gentle, smart, caring guy. He was the first president of the Maine Civil Liberties Union. He's just a very liberal, fair guy. Democrat.

MGINT: Ardent Democrat?

RS: Yeah. He lives right here, he lives here in Lewiston. Went to Bates College.

MGINT: Oh, really?

RS: Uh-huh.

MGINT: What were some of his political standings? What was he involved in?

RS: I'd rather not say.

MGINT: Okay.

MB: How was he . . . ?

RS: He was just a very liberal civil libertarian.

MBINT: Is that how he was, is that how he knew your wife, through the Civil Liberties Union?

RS: No. We'd known each other for years when we first came here. We were just good friends. His daughter went to school with my son.

MGINT: The one at Wesleyan, or Oberlin?

RS: Yeah.

MGINT: Wesleyan.

MGINT: Okay, in your last interview, this is kind of changing topics, but, you implied that you thought politics were very important, and I get that impression again now.

RS: Good.

MGINT: And you said that you wished that more Bates students would be more politically active. Do you . . . ?

RS: Well, that's quite a while ago when you interviewed me for that. I think it's considerably more active now.

MGINT: Really? Okay, yeah, I was going to ask it . . .

RS: Especially with gay rights and social issues.

MGINT: So do you think . . . ?

RS: Feminist rights.

MGINT: . . . they've improved in the past five to ten years?

RS: No question. No question about it. I wouldn't mind being a woman going to Bates College.

MBINT: I don't mind.

MGINT: Me neither.

RS: But if I were, I'd get the hell out during one of those years and go abroad.

MBINT: I probably will.

MGINT: Probably will.

RS: I have some very good Bates friends, graduate school, in Indonesia and back from (*unintelligible word*) Indonesia, New Zealand;, all Peace Corps. Wonderful people. I mean, wonderful people. They've been out of Bates for about three years.

MBINT: Is this Peace Corps work that they do?

RS: Uh-huh, yup.

MBINT: I wanted to ask you a little bit more about Ed Muskie and about your and your wife's relationship with him and some of the other people. Frank Coffin I know you spoke about.

RS: Yeah. Well our relationship with Frank is just absolute, we're just closest friends. And we travel a lot together. I know his family extremely well, I mean, extremely well.

MGINT: What is his family like?

RS: They're ideal. They have four children, Frank and Ruth Coffin have four children and they are just remarkable people. Three daughters and one son. They're very close, very supportive, very interesting people. All married and . . .

MGINT: Are his children politically active?

RS: One is. But now, basically, no, they're not. No, they're socially responsible.

MGINT: What is the name of this child, adult, who's politically active? Frank Coffin's child who is politically active?

RS: No, they're, really none politically active the way you think of it. But they support good people.

MGINT: What do you mean by that?

RS: I mean they're like I am. We're not, I'm not partic-, I'm not a politically active guy.

MGINT: You just have opinions.

RS: Yes, I know who to vote for. Very glad to see Clinton get off.

MBINT: Glad that the Republicans from Maine swung over to the other side.

RS: They did themselves proud, both of them.

MGINT: Who were some of Ed Muskie's friends who you knew?

RS: Shepard Lee, Don Nicoll.

MBINT: Talk to me about Don.

RS: Frank No, I do not want to talk to you about Don. He's the total person, interested in many different things. He was very active in Frank's campaign for governor. And also Muskie.

MBINT: How well did you know Muskie himself?

RS: Well, I didn't know him that well.

MBINT: Did your wife?

RS: Yes, yeah.

MGINT: What did she have to say about him?

RS: What does she or did she? She's not living. Okay? So now you're asking what did she say?

MGINT: Yes.

RS: Well, listen, he was just one of the best governors we ever had.

MGINT: What about as a senator?

RS: I'd say you couldn't find a better senator. He was able to get along with both parties. Didn't like the *Manchester Union* and New Hampshire, but.

MGINT: Understandably.

RS: So, so we would go to the Muskie's house, we'd have dinner with them and . . .

MGINT: Did you discuss politics, or was it . . .?

RS: Oh yes, they discussed, yeah. And when there were Frank and Muskie, and other were here, John Donovan from Bowdoin, we'd have these wild arguments here in this house.

MBINT: What about?

RS: Oh, whether to end the Vietnam War, or what about the effect of the Vietnam War; huge arguments on that.

MBINT: What would Muskie say about that?

RS: He was quite opposed to it. But some people in the audience took issue with him just for the sake of argument; can't really tell you much.

MGINT: And who was John Donovan?

RS: John Donovan ran for Congress for, in Maine, this, national Congress, and he was, he went to Bates and then he might have taught one year here. And then he went down to Bowdoin, was a teacher there in government. And he died maybe ten years ago. And he and his wife and kids are just good friends of mine. All these people were close friends, we're talking about.

MBINT: This is a pretty, I mean, these names, I'm familiar with several of them, and these (*unintelligible word*) are pretty powerful political figures.

RS: Goddamn right.

MBINT: What was it like to be rolling in those circles?

RS: It was exciting. What else could I say? Very informative, very exciting, especially the conventions, Democratic conventions. And I just found it quite exciting. Of course Jean was involved, so, with this and the campaigns. I think that Don Nicoll and she were in the same campaign for Ed Muskie when he was running for governor, and Frank Coffin, too. Frank was running.

MGINT: Did you . . .

RS: What?

MGINT: Did, sorry, . . .

RS: I can't imagine what you're going to ask. I can't tell you very much.

MGINT: No, it's fine. I was just wondering if, when Muskie was governor, his focus was on the Maine economy. And then I heard that when he was senator, he was much more focused on the environment?

RS: Well, that's probably true.

MGINT: Did you support him all the way through?

RS: Of course I supported him. Yup, I certainly did . . .

MGINT: What were

RS: . . . I, Don Nicoll would know so much more about this than I would. I should see him. About time we got together.

MBINT: He lives in Portland.

RS: I know he does.

MBINT: You can give him a call.

RS: I haven't seen him since my wife died. Haven't recovered from that yet. Okay.

MBINT: Have you stayed at all political since your wife passed away?

RS: No.

MBINT: What did, she was . . .

RS: I just know who to vote for. But no, I don't work for any party.

MBINT: Are you still a part of the Maine Civil Liberties Union?

RS: I am, yes.

MGINT: They asked you to speak on behalf of your wife some, a couple of years ago, correct? Have you done anything major since then?

RS: With what, with Jean?

MGINT: No, with the Civil Liberties Union, on her behalf?

RS: No, I go to the board meetings and go to the meetings, and . . .

MBINT: What's going on with that now? How has it evolved since the time when Jean first became involved with it? Like what, how have issues changed?

RS: Well, what it has done is it's got a legal staff now, right? And the people who are on this legal staff are lawyers in Portland, and they give their time.

MGINT: Is it voluntary?

RS: It's all *pro bono*, which means free. Yup. And these lawyers, they handle cases for these indigent people who can't afford legal fees. And then, as I said before, they work with prisoners' rights and women's rights, rights of children to have certain dress codes in high school, some sort of freedom in selecting books in the public school libraries. They've done a, Civil Liberties Union has done so much on that score.

MBINT: What has?

RS: Civil Liberties Union, the MCLU. Very important cases of, taking a case of some school

board that wouldn't let the, I guess 365 Days, it's a paperback on the war, some school boards didn't want the books to be in public school library, so MCL took that case and won it.

MGINT: Was Muskie on the Maine Civil Liberties Union?

RS: I don't think so.

MGINT: Were some of his friends?

RS: I'm sure of that. I don't know who they were.

MBINT: You said that he was, though, involved with the Catalyst organization?

MGINT: That your wife established with . . .

RS: No, he wasn't.

MBINT: He wasn't?

RS: No, he was on the, he was involved with the Board of Education, state Board of Education.

MGINT: Who were some of the other people involved on the Board of Education with him and your wife?

RS: Well, you drive a hard bargain.

MGINT: I'm sorry.

RS: Don't apologize. A guy named Nils (*name*) Wesel.

MGINT: I'm sorry?

RS: Nils Wesel, and, I can't even remember who, Frances Brown. Well, you're driving a hard bargain with these names. Frances Brown, I can't remember them all. One guy from the Bangor power company, I can't really tell you.

MBINT: But your wife was on the Board of Education, or involved in the . . .

RS: The chairman of it.

MGINT: She was also involved in the Maine League of Women Voters, right? How was she involved?

RS: Boy, you're bringing out, I must have talked about this before. She was the founder of the Maine branch of the League of Women Voters.

MGINT: And what did they do?

RS: And also of the Maine branch of the NAACP.

MBINT: She was the founder of these?

RS: Yup.

MBINT: Wow.

MGINT: Wow.

MBINT: There are only twenty-four hours in a day.

RS: Well, she didn't do all these at once.

MGINT: So what did she do with the League of Women Voters? What sorts of things did they work towards?

RS: Well they, the first thing they tried to do was get women's rights going. They had all kinds of lobbies in Augusta for legislation. They had issues on, oh, I really don't know, voters' rights, whatever that means.

MGINT: Do you know if they sought out Muskie's support in these issues?

RS: No, they didn't. No, it was too local. No.

MBINT: Even when he was governor?

RS: Uh-huh.

MBINT: What were Muskie's standpoints on the women's rights issues that your wife dealt with?

RS: You shouldn't have to ask that question.

MBINT: He was a Democrat, right?

MGINT: Ardent Democrat.

RS: Well, yes, very liberal. He's not interested in having women paid less for example, no. So then she also was very much involved with, let's see, what have we talked about?. God, I've mentioned about six things.

MGINT: The Civil Liberties Union, the American Civil Liberties Union . . .

RS: The, a Bowdoin trustee, that was a big . . .

MGINT: . . . the Bowdoin trustees, the Board of Education, the Maine League of Women Voters . . .

RS: I'm sure I've forgotten some things, but . . .

MGINT: . . . NAACP.

RS: Yeah, uh-huh. They have a wing of the University of Southern Maine library, it's a beautiful place, it's on the fourth floor, and that is called the Jean Sampson Center for Diversity. And on that wing there's a, whatever you can think of as diversity, meaning various minority groups: Blacks, gay, lesbian groups. Jean was more concerned with the Blacks in Maine, for example. There aren't many in Maine. How many Blacks do you think there are in Maine?

MGINT: Probably not too many. Maybe, is it eight percent?

RS: About twenty-five hundred. So anyway, this Friday I have to go down to the opening of this center. And I received a degree from the University of Maine in honor of Jean this last year.

MGINT: Congratulations.

RS: Hmmm?

MGINT: Congratulations.

RS: All I had to do was receive it and give a little speech.

MBINT: I gather there have been several awards in her honor.

RS: Oh, there's many, many, yup. Westbrook, Bowdoin. She got an honorary degree from Bowdoin, honorary doctorate.

MBINT: You said that the Bowdoin trustees was one of her larger projects?

RS: That's right, about twenty years. That was very important to Bowdoin because they'd just become coed. And she was quite instrumental in getting this conservative board of trustees to see the light. And then they slowly eliminated the sorority, fraternity system. So that's, well, mostly all of Jean's work.

MGINT: Was she on the Bowdoin trustees at the same time she was on the Board of Education?

RS: No.

MGINT: Different times.

RS: Yeah. She was on the board of, well, she left that about five years ago, trustees at Bowdoin. She was the second woman in the trustees.

MGINT: I don't have . . .

MGINT: Is there anything else that you'd like to add that we haven't covered about either Muskie or Coffin or your wife?

RS: Well, you've forgotten that she was quite a, she was a very competent mother.

MBINT: You said she worked right out of the home, correct?

RS: Yup, upstairs in her office.

MBINT: In your opinion, what was one of Muskie's, this little question I always end with.

RS: Yeah, don't ask me. Ask Don Nicoll.

MGINT: Okay. I won't.

RS: Ask Don Nicoll.

MBINT: Don knows quite a bit.

MGINT: Is there anything else . . . ?

RS: Frank Coffin I can tell you intimately about; not Muskie.

MB: So, I'll ask it in terms of Frank, then. In Frank's political career, what was one goal or change that he most wanted to make? What was the most important thing to him?

RS: I would go for civil rights.

MBINT: And did he achieve it? , I mean did he, in his political career?

RS: Well, he, he wasn't a congressman for very long as I remember. Then he got appointed to this judgeship, so, I can't really tell you about what his congressional career was like, even though I've sailed the Maine coast with him for years.

MGINT: In what respect was he most involved in civil rights?

RS: He was mostly involved as a First Circuit Court judge in the Court of Appeals, and he still operates as a judge right now, on a retired basis, and he has Puerto Rico as part of his jurisdiction, so he's very much involved with civil liberties and civil rights. Of course, he handles appeals cases which come up from the state level. So he's a very remarkable, liberal

judge. One of the finest.

MBINT: Outside of professional circles, what was your relationship with him like? You said that you guys traveled, you sailed?

RS: Yeah.

MBINT: What other sorts of activities was he involved in recreationally?

RS: We hiked all over Maine together, he and his wife, Jean and me. Every New Year's Eve, even up to last New Year's, we'd have these fantastic parties. There are only, there were five couples, we were extremely close. There was Frank and Ruth, Shepard and his wife, Peter Cox and . . .

MGINT: Who was that?

RS: Peter Cox.

MGINT: And who is he?

RS: He writes for the *Maine Times*.

MGINT: Is he politically active also?

RS: Yes, yeah. And then there's Irving Isaacson and Judith Magyar Isaacson.

MGINT: I've heard those names.

RS: Yeah, she's a survivor from the Holocaust. Well, it's this group of six couples, and we're just the most loyal close couples we've ever had, unbelievably close. Just doesn't exist in the world. It does. And we go off together and go sailing. And New Year's Eve we always have a party together and stay at somebody's house, or do plays together, dance and gourmet dinners, and it's every year. This is the first year I've been without Jean.

MBINT: Did you not go this year?

RS: We went anyway, yup.

MGINT: Do you have any further questions, Marisa?

MBINT: I think we're almost out of time anyway.

MGINT: Okay. I have no further questions. Thank you very much for your time and your information.

End of Interview

