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## Shevis, Estelle "Stell" and William "Shev" oral history interview

Andrea L'Hommedieu

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# **Interview with William “Shev” and Estelle “Stell” Shevis by Andrea L’Hommedieu**

*Summary Sheet and Transcript*

## **Interviewee**

Shevis, Estelle “Stell”  
Shevis, William “Shev”

## **Interviewer**

L’Hommedieu, Andrea

## **Date**

December 9, 2002

## **Place**

Camden, Maine

## **ID Number**

MOH 381

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## **Biographical Note**

Mildred Estelle “Stell” (Beehner) Shevis was born on July 1, 1915 in Hartford, Connecticut to George and Mildred Beehner and grew up in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She attended Watertown High School before going on to the Massachusetts College of Art. Here she met her future husband William “Shev” Shevis. Shev Shevis emigrated from Scotland in 1928. He grew up in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts and graduated from the Massachusetts College of Art in 1937. After they were married, Stell and Shev moved to Belmont, Maine to become freelance artists, where they were one of only 2 Democratic families in the town. They designed many things for Muskie’s 1968 campaign for vice president including tie clips, cuff links, pins and chickadee scarves.

## **Scope and Content Note**

Interview includes discussions of: family backgrounds; moving to Belmont, Maine; politics in Belmont; reading and books; first impression of Ed Muskie; designing for Ed Muskie’s campaign; impressions of Frank Coffin; Owen Smith; and lasting impression of Ed Muskie.

## **Indexed Names**

Beehner, George John  
Beehner, Mildred Post  
Coffin, Frank Morey  
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## **Transcript**

**Andrea L'Hommedieu:** This is an interview with William and Estelle Shevis at their home in Camden, Maine on December 9, the year 2002, and this is Andrea L'Hommedieu. Estelle, I will start with you. Could you state your full name, including your maiden name?

**Estelle Shevis:** My full name, which I always hated, is Mildred Estelle Beehner.

**AL:** How do you spell that?

**ES:** B-E-E-H-N-E-R.

**AL:** And now Shevis.

**ES:** And now Shevis. And I've always been called Stell, because my mother's name was Mildred and I didn't want to be called that, and I didn't like Estelle so I just cut off, just Stell.

**AL:** And where and when were you born?

**ES:** I was born in, on July 1st, 1915 in Hartford, Connecticut.

**AL:** And is that where you grew up?

**ES:** No. We moved, I was told, shortly after that up to Cambridge, Massachusetts, and that's where I grew up.

**AL:** And what were your parents' names and their occupations?

**ES:** My father was George John Beehner and he was a metal smith, and then he went into the automobile business and finally had his own shop. And my mother's name was Mildred Alice Post Beehner, and she grew up in Connecticut. And she never worked outside the home but she certainly worked hard inside. I was the oldest of four girls and, do you want to hear about where we lived?

**AL:** Yes.

**ES:** We lived in a part of Cambridge that had no electricity. So we had gas lights and a gas stove, and a gas iron that was connected to the stove with a rubber tube. And when my mother lit it she turned on the gas first then she held a match to the side of the iron and these flames would spurt out. It was very scary. And we were not allowed to use it. And she'd boil the white clothes on the stove, we also had a coal stove, she'd scrub the clothes in the sink on one of those scrubbing boards, wrung them out by hand, carried them outdoors, hung them up. And every week she ironed twenty-eight little dresses because there were four girls in the family, and we had a clean dress every single day to wear to school or church. I don't know how she did it, really.

**AL:** Now, in modern terms that's just -

**ES:** Slavery. [laughter]

**AL:** And so you went to public or private schools?

**ES:** Went to public school, it was the Morse School on Putnam Avenue in Cambridge. And I went there for eight years, no kindergarten in those days. And then when I was ready for high school we moved out to Watertown, which was sort of in the country then. My father bought a house, we'd been renting up until then, and I went to the Watertown High School and graduated *cum laude*. And I studied art there; I was allowed to take ten periods of art instead of any sciences. And, of course, I didn't want to take biology or chemistry and now I wish I had, it would be very useful in my work.

**William Shevis:** A little physics would have helped.

**ES:** Yes, yes. Well then I went on to Massachusetts College of Art in Boston, which is where I met Shevis. We were both freshmen at the same time but he was, what did they call you?

**WS:** I was called an irregular student.

**ES:** That's right, an irregular student. Because, why was that? Because you didn't take -?

**WS:** I didn't uh, qualify on the academic record, which is just as well, I wasn't interested in all that.

**ES:** Oh, because as a regular student I had to take the required courses in English, art history, psychology and mechanical drawing, as well as the painting and drawing courses.

**WS:** And I had done all that at the library, I didn't need to worry about doing it in school.

**ES:** That's right. He got a scholarship to the school through his, through Miss Adams. She wasn't your art teacher was she, she was your English teacher.

**WS:** I can't think of it at the moment.

**AL:** Now, when you were growing up, were your parents involved in the community socially or politically?

**ES:** No, my mother didn't have time for anything except taking care of us four girls, I was the oldest, and keeping house. And my father was working so hard, you know, that was during the Depression. I do remember when the First World War came along, he didn't go in the service because he had all these children, but I remember that he and a neighbor man started to dig up our front yard and plant vegetables. Nothing grew because the soil was so terrible, and they really didn't know how to do it, but they did make the effort.

**AL:** Well, were politics ever discussed at home? Did your dad have opinions?

**ES:** Well, my dad had opinions, yes. My mother went along with whatever he said. But, you know, I don't remember really. There was a woman friend who used to come for dinner on Sundays, and she was very argumentative and I remember that she and my father would talk politics. But I really didn't pay any attention, I was not interested. Until, in art school, I met Polly, remember Polly?

**WS:** Yes.

**ES:** Alpert, she was then. And she was very interested in the Democratic Party, and who was running then? Was it Truman? It was a long time ago.

**WS:** We were talking about Hoover back then.

**ES:** Was it? Hmm. That was in the thirties. But I do remember going to a demonstration in Copley Plaza, a lot of people standing around with banners and so forth. I think that's when we first became interested. Weren't we going together then?

**WS:** Well, that got all mixed up. Is it all right for me to interrupt you?

**AL:** Oh, absolutely, pipe right in. I'll go backwards with you.

**WS:** Well, at that time Stell now is talking about, the election would have been, what, 1930, when Roosevelt came in? Is that right? But before that I grew up, well, I came over here from

Scotland when I was fourteen in 1928, when this country was zooming up just like the eighties, you know, and then of course in 1929 everything just collapsed. And that Depression was really rugged for me particularly. Well, I mean for me, because I was centered on that.

But I was, I grew up in Jamaica Plain, I went to the Aggasiz Grammar School in Jamaica Plain. I was shoved back into the seventh grade because I didn't have any American history. And I said to the teacher, "But Madame there is no American history, it is all much too recent." And you know what that did to me, right? I mean, I was, what do you call it, black-.

**ES:** You were too fresh, just fresh.

**WS:** It wasn't fresh, I mean -

**ES:** Well, she thought you were being fresh.

**WS:** To me American history, reading American history was like reading yesterday's newspaper, because my introduction to history was the Roman conquest of Britain. And then from there we sort of came on up along, by 1770 you're up to date, you know. But anyway, that's what happened. But Jamaica Plain, you know, was home to James Curley, mayor of Boston, that rogue, and at that time they had ward departments, wards, you know, bosses of the wards, political operators, I suppose they still do.

You know, I'm not really political, but in that time we were often tapped, a bunch of bright school kids were tapped by the different ward bosses to do the running, you know, you go and contact so-and-so or contact so-and-so and that. And so I worked for Curley on a couple of his governor election deals, and you got very well paid for it, I mean way back then.

**ES:** Were you carrying messages, you mean?

**WS:** Well, it was a matter of, at the voting period you would be given a list of people to get in touch with, if they needed a ride to the polls, that kind of thing. And also, if Curley was making speeches we were paid to be there as another body, you know.

**ES:** Oh, a clique.

**WS:** You know, like nowadays you have TV and everybody gets in there to get on the tube, whether they're paid or not. But back then we were paid for this kind of thing. And I remember when, now I can't remember, who was running for president back then? But we were paid for that, too. In fact we were paid for an entire day to carry banners and try to get other people to come in to make a big crowd.

**ES:** How much were you paid?

**WS:** Fifteen dollars a day, which was fantastic in those days.

**ES:** That was more than a week's pay.

**WS:** I suppose back, nowadays that would be a hundred dollars or even more. I mean, they were just shelling the money out. Well, Curley, you know, was a crook. A lot of politicians are, you know. But he never took a bribe. He would have open house for constituents on Sunday morning after Mass, and he had a couple of, what would you call it, controllers, you know, door keepers, you can go in, you can go in. And there was a waste basket, and anybody that wanted a favor dropped an envelope in there. Curley never saw that, somebody else took care of all that stuff. So he could always say, "I never took a bribe." Of course he landed up in jail after a while, but he was a great guy, I mean, very outgoing and he always remembered people's names, you know, I mean, this was really fantastic. And he gave on Fourth of July, you know, he lived on the Jamaica Way right by the Jamaica Pond, you don't know Boston.

**AL:** No.

**WS:** A beautiful pond. And he would put on a fireworks display for the city of Boston, but of course it was for himself, you know, and the rest of it. But it was great, fantastic, and it would go on for, well, I don't know, I remember for an hour or more which may be overdoing it. But we'd get one of those rowboats and row out into the middle of the lake, the pond, and watch this stuff. And oftentimes this stuff would come down, you know, the empty shells would come down around you.

**ES:** Were they hot?

**WS:** Well, they were charred, yes.

**ES:** I mean, if they touched you I'd think they'd burn.

**WS:** Well, no, they never touched us. But Curley did that, and of course he was able to stay governor for, what, three terms, more? Because he was thumbing his nose at the Brahmins, you know. So you had not only all the Irish, you had the Italians and everybody else saying, 'good for you'.

**AL:** Now you came here from Scotland at age fourteen?

**WS:** Yes.

**AL:** Did you come by yourself, or?

**WS:** My brother and I came over. My family was over---, part of my family was over here. My mother had died when I was nine, and my brother -

**ES:** Excuse me, you were born in Ireland.

**WS:** Well, there's no record of that, you know.

**ES:** Well, that's what you told me, that you used to have a record.

**WS:** We had a fire, you know, that wiped us out out in Belmont, out in the back country here, and then I tried to get my papers all back together but I could never find my birth certificate. I kept writing to Belfast, Ireland, I kept writing to Scotland, no record of my birth. There were records of my brother and sister, but not me, so I'm a non-person I guess.

**ES:** But you had your naturalization papers.

**WS:** Yeah, I had no problem getting that renewed. It seems to me that we're really not, there's nothing here that has any contact with Muskie.

**AL:** Oh, well we're getting to that, I promise. Now you met, you both met at art school in Boston?

**WS:** Yes.

**AL:** And what year was that, in the thirties?

**WS:** Well, we started in art school in 1933, and Stell graduated in '37, but I was an irregular student, I wouldn't get a diploma, you know. But anyway, I had to quit in February of '37, I couldn't carry on any longer.

**ES:** Well, you didn't have enough money.

**WS:** I didn't have, yeah.

**ES:** You didn't have a job.

**WS:** I had two jobs, I had a full schedule in the art section of the school.

**ES:** You know, the tuition was seventy-five dollars a year.

**WS:** Yeah.

**ES:** And you did get a scholarship, enough for that last year.

**WS:** No, I got a, the first year I had a scholarship from the high school.

**ES:** But then, you know, one needed to buy paper and paints and all that.

**WS:** Yeah, and you know, the University of Maine supplies all that stuff?

**ES:** Now they do.

**WS:** I just couldn't believe that.



**AL:** Art supplies can be very expensive, can't they?

**WS:** Yeah, yeah, it could be, because in relative terms it certainly wasn't as expensive as it would be today.

**ES:** I think I fell in love with his work first. He did these very delicate, pale watercolors, and I found out after we got to know one another that he was making the paint last as long as possible, so that's why they were so delicate.

**WS:** Yes, very delicate, right. And somebody stole every damn thing that I produced.

**ES:** That's right, and I had done a portrait of him, which was also stolen. It was a good one, too.

**AL:** This was in Boston?

**ES:** At the school, yeah.

**AL:** Well that could be a compliment.

**WS:** Well, I suppose so, but somebody was evidently building up their own portfolio.

**ES:** Or else they had a mad crush on him. I don't know.

**WS:** Well.

**AL:** Now how did the two of you end up in Maine?

**WS:** Well, you know, what you're doing here is getting a history of us.

**AL:** Yes, I am.

**ES:** Well that's all right. Will we be able to have a copy of the tape?

**AL:** Absolutely.

**WS:** When we got out of art school -

**ES:** Well, excuse me a minute. My father used to bring me and my family to Maine on fishing trips, my father was a great fisherman. And so I remembered Maine as being a most wonderful place. And after we had lived in New Jersey for five years, and I had, I was commuting from Hackensack to the city because I had a job in a greeting card place, and he was doing freelance work and staying home with the kids. And so after we'd saved enough money, we started looking through the real estate section of the Sunday papers and land in Maine was, and houses, were still pretty cheap. So we decided we would move to Maine and both do freelance art work.

**WS:** Yeah, but what's her name Louise Dickinson Rich was -

**ES:** Right, she wrote that book called We Took to the Woods, and that was a great influence.

**WS:** Do you know that book?

**AL:** No.

**WS:** You don't know those books? Well, maybe you're lucky, because it's a kind of thing that's written for romantic suckers.

**ES:** It was true, though. I mean, she and her family moved to Maine and I think they started to live off the land and we thought, well, we can do that.

**WS:** Yeah, but one of our classmates, we were talking one time about what we'd do, you know, when we got out of school, the kind of job we'd get and if we made any real money; what would we do, where would we go. And this friend of ours said, "If you ever want to get out of this city, go to Camden, Maine." This was back in, oh, 1935.

**ES:** That's right, he said it has everything, it has the ocean and the lakes and the hills, and he was right.

**WS:** Anyway, but yeah, that was kind of rough. We came up here and landed out in Belmont, and there was no electricity out there. They had electricity along the coast there. And there was just this little pocket, like Stell said, in Cambridge, a little section that had no electricity. We didn't have any electricity.

**ES:** But, we bought, you came up by bus because, you know, we didn't have a car living down there, and he stayed at a little bed and breakfast. It was called a tourist home in those days, a dollar a night I think. But he went around with a Strout real estate agent and he saw this little place out in the country, nice little house, almost new, with twelve acres of land, for eighteen hundred dollars.

**WS:** Yeah, but for eighteen hundred dollars I could have bought half a dozen houses in Camden or Rockport.

**ES:** Right on the water.

**WS:** But she insisted she wanted to be out in the country away from people, she was-

**ES:** Well, that's because we had very unpleasant neighbors where we were living in Hackensack and I just wanted to be away from neighbors.

**WS:** And our nearest neighbors were five moose that traveled from Searsmont over to Ducktrap and back.

**ES:** Well, you know, Shevis has written a book called Stumbling Into Maine and Staying, and you could borrow that and read the whole story, because it would take too long to go through all that right now, about how we, we had twelve acres. You know, there's a book called Five Acres And Independence [author: Maurice G. Kains] which also was a big influence, because that first year we had a whole acre plowed up and we planted corn and beans and tomatoes and, you know, everything. And as soon as the corn was ready to be picked, the raccoons got it, and something else got everything else, so we ended up with mostly beans. And I canned so many string beans that I don't want to see them.

**WS:** When we came to Maine, I just, I was appalled, because this was I felt the most derelict country I had ever entered. And we had nothing in common with the neighbors, our points of reference, you know, were so far apart that there was really no communication. And I was doing print making at the time. Of course, we moved up here with the assumption that we'd still be able to keep my contacts in New York and in Boston, but communications were impossible. We were on a, the telephone line was centered in Liberty, and it had, I don't know, half a dozen lines, but on each line, our line had, what was it, nineteen people, nineteen subscribers. And in the summer time there were twenty-four.

**ES:** And every time you lifted, you know, it was on the wall, you'd lift the receiver and you had to crank to get the operator and a bell would ring in everybody's house, when you were trying to get the operator, and they would all lift up the receiver to see who was calling whom.

**AL:** Right. Not a lot of privacy, huh?

**WS:** And the thing is that you realized, I always, we were cranking to get the operator's attention, you know. Everybody would recognize the way you cranked.

**ES:** Well, I don't know about that.

**WS:** So we were foreigners in this place and we were calling Boston and New York? What are they talking about? And of course we were talking our, what do you call it, our jargon, you know, in the commercial art field. And, foreign words, what do they mean, this is code, you know. And then one of our buddies, my buddies down to New York, mailed me as a joke a six month subscription to the *Daily Worker*. Do you know the *Daily*?

**ES:** Communist magazine.

**WS:** You don't know the *Daily Worker*, the Communist newspaper? And of course back then, you know. But in a liberated area, you know, the Communist, what would you call it, concept, was really liberating, you know. When we were in school there were all these cliques, like we'd go over to Harvard to one of these get-togethers to talk about the Communist program and how wonderful it was that they had all this equality of opportunity and that. You know, we didn't really know what the hell was going on, but we went along just to find, I personally, and Stell, we weren't interested. In fact, I thought the whole thing was a bit flaky. But it was interesting to be with a bunch of people who were throwing all these political theories around. And then of course there was the, that, the Spanish Civil War came along, and a lot of those, well, I wouldn't

say a lot.

**ES:** But you're diverting, I think.

**WS:** Well, I can remember Jim Smith's brother involved in that, what was it called, the public squadron or something, and he was killed over there.

**ES:** In Spain, you mean? Was that in Spain?

**WS:** In Spain, yeah, when Franco was rampaging.

**ES:** But to get back to Maine, after we'd been there a few years we went to the town meetings and they were having the school bus, wasn't it, remember? And we went in together and we sat down together not realizing that this was not done. The men sat on one side and the women sat on the other side.

**WS:** Yeah, they had this convention, the women over there, the men over here. You go to parties around here now and the same thing happens, right? I always gravitate to the women, but anyway, we sat together and this was, what would you call it?

**ES:** Not done.

**WS:** Not done, it was something you didn't do. But anyway, I was fascinated with this Democratic concept of town meetings, you know, where you could get up and say what you felt about how things were going in town, which I did. But at this particular time, I can't remember now just what it was, but I started, I jumped up and started talking about something, it may have been, Stell had gotten herself into a muddle with the schools, maybe it was that. But anyway, when I stopped to take a breath, somebody way in the back said, "If you know so goddamn much about running the town, why don't you do it?" And somebody else said, "I second that motion," you know.

**ES:** And the moderator said, "All those in favor."

**WS:** Bangs his gavel and says, "All in favor say 'aye'," you know, so everybody says, 'aye' except us.

**ES:** So he became first selectman.

**WS:** So I was railroaded into being first selectman.

**ES:** And that also included being fire warden, warden of the poor.

**WS:** The health officer, plumbing inspector, you know, everything.

**ES:** And fence viewer.

**WS:** Which nobody paid any attention to all that stuff.

**ES:** Well you did, you had to check up, remember that?

**WS:** Well, yes, I know, but people went ahead and did things themselves.

**ES:** And as fence viewer, that meant that once a year he had to go with the neighboring head man and walk around the perimeter of the towns to see that the fences were in the right places and markers were still there.

**AL:** Did this position pay anything or was it . . . ?

**WS:** Well, no, not really. I got paid a dollar an hour for any actual work I did.

**ES:** Physical work, not all the mental work that went into it.

**WS:** Yeah, and of course what happened was that, these characters who, what do you call it, shoved me into this position, wanted to show me up as a real dumb head, you know. And so many, a lot of them paid their property tax by working, you know, doing town work like clearing roads and brush and cutting town firewood, things like that. So I had this list of people who would do jobs around town, and when something occurred I'd call two or three of them. And they always said, "Gee, I can't do it today, maybe tomorrow. Why don't you call me later."

**ES:** Or else they would be sick or they'd have a bad back and they couldn't do that kind of work.

**WS:** Yeah, so well after a couple of weeks I realized they were giving me the business -

**ES:** Well, he would go out and do it himself.

**WS:** So I would go out and do the work myself, and I wasn't used to this, you know, my dainty hands were calloused. And anyway, I realized that they were giving me the business. So when it come to road work or anything like that I just called, I had met the owner of the gravel works over in Belfast, so I just called him up and said, "Why don't you go out and tend to that piece of road and send me the bill." And actually it came out cheaper, you know, because these guys would piddle around, you know.

**ES:** And the work was done quicker and better.

**WS:** But after three years I just couldn't take this any more.

**ES:** They kept wanting him to continue, but he couldn't afford to.

**WS:** Yeah, and the, what would you call it, I suppose the Democratic committee in Waldo county wanted me to run for the legislature, you know, because I suppose they figured that as a first selectman I was interested in politics.

**ES:** Also he talked so much and so well.

**WS:** And I said, that's nothing I want. But after a few years I said, "I've just got to make a living for my family. I can't do this."

**ES:** You forgot to tell her that when we moved to Belmont we became two of the four Democrats in town.

**WS:** Yeah, yeah. When I went down to register, I went up to register at the town office, not the town, town clerk place, we didn't have an office. And she said, well, "How do you want to register?" And I said, "I'm an independent." She said, "But we don't have any independent in Maine." And I said, "Well in that case I am a Democrat." So she says, "Oh." So she reached under her desk and she pulled out a paper, bright yellow paper, and said, "Just sign here." And I picked up the pen and I was just about to write when I saw "member of the Republican party." So I said to her, "You made a mistake here. Don't you have a Democratic paper?" "Oh," she said, "I guess I made a mistake." I mean, the place, you know, in fact this whole area was solid Republican. And when I think about it back then, I think, 'How did Muskie ever make it as a Democrat', you know? But he did.

**AL:** So did you find out who the other two Democrats were?

**ES:** Oh yes, yes.

**WS:** Oh yes, yeah, that was (*name sounds like: Jephtha*) and Wilmer Buck, and we're not counting the women, you know, because they sort of, they may all have been registered as Republicans, but every so often one of them would vote Democratic just to prove that she was independent. But the Bucks were the only other family that were Democrats, I mean registered Democrats.

**ES:** And our children went to a one room school house, one room with -

**WS:** This is really getting off.

**ES:** Well, it's Maine history in a way.

**AL:** Yeah, Maine history is important.

**ES:** You know, the one room school house, may I describe it? A little wooden building, actually one room with a privy attached.

**WS:** Out back.

**ES:** No, it was attached.

**WS:** Yes, it was out back.

**ES:** And no electricity. And on, it had a wood stove with one of those stove pipes that went up to the ceiling and then over and out, and that was the heat. And on a dark day in winter, the teacher would send one of the older boys to a neighbor to borrow a lamp because they weren't allowed to keep kerosene lamps in the school. And our children went to that. Jennifer, our oldest, was five when we went to Maine and she had gone to kindergarten. But they all went there for eight years, and the teacher, I think there were two teachers in that time. Mrs. Cushman, the teacher who was there when we moved there, was paid six hundred dollars a year for teaching all those children, all those grades.

**WS:** It was a dreadful school. We just couldn't believe. Our trouble was that we had thought the one room school here is a traditional educational facility in America, you know. But we never -

**ES:** Well in a way it was good because the older children helped the younger children.

**WS:** Yeah, very progressive.

**ES:** And that reinforced what they had learned.

**WS:** Yes, but there were so many gaps in their education.

**ES:** But we got books, the bookmobile from the State Library came around town, and-

**WS:** Yes, but before that we had them shipped.

**ES:** Yes, they would ship you a few, a box full of books.

**WS:** Yeah, that was a godsend, the State Library. I don't know if they still do that nowadays, but back then. And I think we were the only family in, I won't say the county, but certainly in our area who made use of that. And then, yeah, and then a few years later they had a bookmobile that came around. But we don't want to get into that. If you really want all this kind of stuff on our background, you should buy my book.

**AL:** Okay, I will take that under consideration.

**WS:** It's called, Stumbling Into Maine and Staying, and I have sold forty-one copies so far at thirty dollars apiece. Maybe more than I would get if it's taken up by a commercial publisher.

**ES:** Well, he had written another book called Stell's Dreamhouse about how we, we used to go to Mexico every winter and we finally built a house down there, and the book is about all the funny -

**WS:** What Stell got me into.

**ES:** - things that happened while we were doing that. But he had that book printed, and he had

to have five hundred copies printed. Some of them were sold locally in the bookstores, but he's still got quite a few of those left.

**WS:** Oh yeah, I've been doing quite a lot of, what would you call it, authoring. Writing and illustrating my books. When we first came here and we realized that our contacts in New York and Boston were fading, because of the communication problems -

**ES:** Well, not only that but, you know, by then men were coming back from overseas and they needed jobs right in the city and they were there. And we were so far away. So that's when . . . .

**WS:** That's right, they were right there. Anyway, so I set up a little print shop myself, and it was called the Cow Stall Press because it was in the old, I set it up in the cow stall in one section of the barn, and that was 1946. And over the years once in a while I would, I'd print something. But of course my equipment, we had a wonderful old Washington press, a great, what they used to call a newspaper press, you know, it was a big, it took a double sheet. And then I had a Kelsey press, the foot treadle press. I got interested in printing when I attended the Agassiz School in Jamaica Plain because we had shop work at the John Elliot School on Elliot Street. You know John Elliot?

**AL:** No.

**WS:** Didn't you say you graduated from college? You know nothing about your own colonial history?

**ES:** I don't know who John Elliot was either, so tell us.

**WS:** John Elliot was one of the educators connected with Harvard, the first university in the country. You are going to have to do some remedial reading. Anyway, we had shop work, you know, carpentry, and we had a little print shop and an old Kelsey foot treadle press.

**ES:** Oh, that's where you learned to set type. He had to pick up all the little letters and put them -

**WS:** Yeah, and you know, you set type upside down, you know, you have a, I forget now what you call, you've got a little rig here and you set the type this way. And I had no trouble with that because I learned to read upside down.

**AL:** How did you learn to read upside down?

**WS:** Well, I can't really remember. I mean, all I can remember is that on Sundays the only book that was allowed was the Bible. And I was a child, I learned to read when I was about four, and I would -

**ES:** Somebody was obviously reading the book to you.

**WS:** Somebody was reading the book there and running their finger along as they were



reading, see, so I was following this.

**ES:** From the other side of the book.

**WS:** And all of a sudden these characters made sense. Don't ask me, you know, actually, learning to read is one of the most magical occasions anybody can -

**ES:** That's true, because I can remember the day I learned to read in the first grade, and the teacher had this phonetic chart on the wall, you know, A-T, at, C-A-T, cat, and suddenly I knew I could read. It was magical.

**WS:** How did you learn to read? I mean, you don't have any memory of it?

**AL:** Well, I think that my house was always surrounded with books, piles of books everywhere and I don't remember the moment but I know I was read to and had books all the time. I more remember my brother, because he read at a very early age and read way beyond his years, but that's what I remember. I don't remember me, I remember him. He was my little brother, and I can remember [that].

**WS:** Anyway, that's why I got interested in the print shop area, and I had no difficulty with it. And I was always fascinated. Well, of course I was going to be an artist, you know, and getting into commercial art I made use of my knowledge of type and type faces and, you know, I sort of just, what would you call it, sort of just moved into it. And so when we came up here, I got this little Kelsey press, foot treadle press. We didn't have any electricity out there at the time, so I ran that, you know, pedaling it like a sewing machine.

**ES:** It was what you call a clamshell press really.

**WS:** Yeah, it came up like this.

**ES:** The ink was on one side and came up against the block or the type.

**WS:** In fact I still got a couple of cards that I printed on that. Anyway, when we did get electricity, and I'm not going to go into that but you can take this to Don and he can find out why Muskie and I, about how Muskie greeted me when we first met. And anyway, I managed to goose the electric company into providing electric service to this desolate area. It was a struggle. Then a friend of mine who was a wiz, Howard Jones, came out to our place and helped me electrify the press and set it up with a set of gears so I could print anything from two hundred an hour to twelve hundred an hour, at the time hand feeding.

**ES:** We used to pay the children to slip sheet everything, you know, because you couldn't pile stuff right on top, you had to spread them all out to dry and then put paper across and then put another layer on and so forth. So we paid the children ten cents an hour.

**AL:** Let me stop real quick and flip the tape over.

*End of Side A*  
*Side B*

**AL:** We are now on Side B of the interview with Shevis and Stell, and you were talking about your printing press. I want to go now to when you first heard about Ed Muskie.

**WS:** Well, it wasn't a matter of, well, I can't really remember. It must have been that the two Democratic committee members in Waldo County probably came to me and asked me if I would help out in his campaign. This must have been for governor.

**AL:** In '53, '54?

**WS:** Yeah.

**AL:** Do you know, who were those -?

**WS:** And I don't remember -

**ES:** Shevis, excuse me, wasn't it, no, I'm sorry.

**WS:** I can't think that I met him before that.

**ES:** Well, we didn't move to Maine until '45.

**WS:** Well, yes, but he was in the legislature. Anyway, and I can't remember whether I was still the selectman or not. The dates themselves get to be a little confused. But anyway, he and Frank Coffin, he and Frank Coffin stopped by to check with me I guess, and ask me for whatever support I could give. But, you know, I wasn't really into politics. Well, for one thing, out where we were I was, if I were to be political it would have been at odds with practically everybody in the area, you know, because they were hard shell Republican. And I had been, what would you call it?

**AL:** Buttonholed?

**WS:** Yes, I had been tagged with not just being a liberal but being a damn Communist, you know, and we had these weird ideas. And not only that, we had a funny way of making a living. What on earth did these people do, you know? They sat around fiddling around on a piece of paper, you know.

**ES:** Remember when somebody asked you what you were doing, to-ing and fro-ing upstairs in the barn late at night? And you asked him how he knew that and he said, well, he had bird glasses and he liked to watch the birds. But at night? Anyway, he was looking, from about a mile away. And we used to be working at night because it was easier after the children were in bed, and he would be upstairs printing big prints, that's when you were using the Washington press, and hanging them on a line to dry. You had to pin them up to dry. And that's what he saw you doing; he couldn't figure it out.

**WS:** Yeah, and I can remember a couple of people asked me, “Well, what actually do you do?” And one time I just got fed up with it, I said, “Well, I'm just like you,” I said, “I cut the wood.”

**ES:** You cut a little wood, that's what you said. He was cutting wood blocks, of course, and printing them, but that made sense to them.

**WS:** So where do we go from here?

**AL:** Well, when did you -?

**ES:** Well, I wanted to say that when, we had started printing handkerchiefs, block printing them, and making folders to match that were easy to mail as a gift, and we were starting to sell those at fairs and so forth. And somebody must have seen those because they asked us to print a lot of them for the Democratic Party as a fund raiser.

**WS:** Yeah.

**ES:** And so we designed a handkerchief with a lot of donkeys galloping around on it.

**WS:** That was for the, when Muskie was running for governor.

**ES:** Okay, so we printed probably a hundred dozen.

**WS:** Anyway, when I met, when Muskie and Frank Coffin showed up, the first thing Muskie said was, “Well, you're the guy who took on Central Maine Power and almost won.” He said, “I'm glad to meet you.” And, well, that's in this. And Frank Coffin said, “You're a fighter and we need you on our team.” I can remember that. And I said, “Well, that wouldn't work,” I said, you know, “because I'm not really into politics.” And he said, “Well, aren't you first selectman?” And I said, “Yeah, but I was shanghaied into that,” I said, “really politics are not the kind of thing I want to do.” But we kept in touch. And then when Muskie was running for Senate we, I was asked to, for some ideas, you know, for his campaign, but that didn't work out too well because -

**ES:** You designed a little logo.

**WS:** Yeah, that's right, I designed a logo for him.

**ES:** I think they had it made into tie pins or something.

**WS:** And then they had that made into cuff links.

**ES:** And tie pins.

**WS:** And a tie pin. Doesn't Don have one of those?

**ES:** He must have.

**WS:** A set of those?

**AL:** Probably.

**WS:** I did have a set, but it's disappeared. I think I may have given it to my son.

**ES:** And then we designed, maybe it was, I do have a work book and I checked back on that, that we printed forty dozen scarves for Mrs. Muskie to give as Christmas gifts, with chickadees on them, because the chickadee is the Maine state bird.

**WS:** Yeah, and -

**ES:** And that was in '68.

**AL:** That was the vice presidential campaign.

**ES:** Okay.

**AL:** And also, was there something about the plane?

**WS:** About the what?

**ES:** The airplane.

**AL:** The airplane, the Downeast Yankee?

**ES:** Yes, the logo that was made into the pins and so forth was used on the plane in a larger form.

**WS:** Yeah, what was the logo? Downeast Yankee or something like that?

**AL:** Yes, yup, that's what Don told me in my notes.

**WS:** Well, then I'm sure that Don must have one of those sets.

**ES:** You see, our records don't go back beyond '64 because we lost everything in a fire.

**WS:** We lost everything after, you know, before '64, all the dates, you know, anything that we could really check on, they're just gone. But we did keep in touch, and I know that I sent Muskie two or three framed prints, you know, for his office. But I can't remember exactly what they, what they were.

Oh, you know, one of the things, while you're taking in all this kind of thing, you should talk to our son-in-law, Peter McCarthy, because he called Senator Muskie up when he was discharged

from the Army and landed in Fort Dix, isn't it, in New Jersey, in the middle of a snowstorm. And the commanding officer there put them all to work shoveling snow. And Peter said, "We're discharged. All we're doing here is waiting to leave the base and get home." And he kicked up a bit of a fuss about it.

**ES:** Well, he had a wife and baby waiting for him.

**WS:** And somebody said, "Why don't you call your senator and complain?" So he did. He went and got on the public phone, and evidently he must have asked the operator, "I want to get in touch with Muskie." And he got Muskie and he told him, he said, "I want to go home, I'm all discharged, those guys are holding me and all my buddies to do the, shoveling snow. He's got a whole Army, what do you . . . A Complement there. And Muskie said, "I'll take care of it." And you should, he complained about the food, he said, "There's no milk on the table," or no something or other. And the very next meal there was milk all over the place and everything. And the commanding officer came in and went down the table and said, "Are you satisfied now? Are you satisfied now?"

**ES:** And they were released the very next day.

**WS:** Peter said, "I'm a Democrat from Belfast, Maine, and I want you to do something about this."

**AL:** That's neat. What were your impressions of Senator Muskie and Frank Coffin when you met them?

**WS:** Well, it was my impression that Frank Coffin was Muskie's brains. Now, whether that's true or not, I think Muskie was pretty smart himself. But Frank Coffin was the guy who sort of pulled things into place, isn't he? But we lost touch, you know, after a while. I mean, we kept, what would you call it, we kept in touch but we didn't keep in close touch.

**ES:** Well, Christmas cards and that stuff.

**WS:** But I can remember after the fire, when we opened a shop and gallery over here next door, and Frank Coffin by then was a Federal judge, he stopped in in Camden, with his entire family, and came into the shop and acted as though we were really important people. "I want you to meet," you know. I mean, I felt, here was somebody who really had made, what do you call?

**AL:** I know what you're saying.

**ES:** A name for himself.

**WS:** Yeah, he'd made, he had a certain prestige, and yet he was acting as though we were even more important than he was. I mean, I felt that Frank was a very modest man, you know, and I think he and Muskie were really a very good team. I think they were mental equals for one thing. But other than that, you know, it seems to me that Don is sort of pushing us here, because

we really don't have anything to contribute to Muskie's record.

**AL:** Now, my other question is, being that you were two Democrats in a highly Republican area, who were some of the others in, say, Waldo County that you knew that were Democrats who were active?

**ES:** It wasn't Waldo County so much, because we found friends in Camden which is Knox County.

**AL:** Oh, I'm sorry, Knox County.

**ES:** Yes.

**WS:** But Camden was solid Republicans then. Oh well, there was always someone.

**ES:** No it wasn't, because we, there was Owen and Joan.

**WS:** That's right, and the Dietzes.

**ES:** Lew Dietz was very active in the Democratic Party, he went to some of the big, what do you call them, meetings.

**WS:** The conventions (*unintelligible phrase*).

**ES:** He's gone now, I wish you could have talked to him.

**WS:** No, we backed away from all that. I mean, we voted Democrat, we thought Democrat.

**ES:** Well, partly because we were struggling so hard to make a living for ourselves and our four children, you know, it was a full time thing. And then after the fire we lost everything. We had to start all over again, and that's when we moved to, bought that big house next door, enormous -

**WS:** You mentioned Owen Smith, but I met Owen through Lew Dietz, and Owen had been handling the Belfast paper, the *Journal*, and then there was an offshoot on that, the, Owen started the paper called the -

**ES:** *Outdoor Maine*, wasn't it?

**WS:** No, no, *The Fisherman, New England Fisherman*, wasn't it? You haven't got that? I'm pretty sure it was called *The New England Fisherman*, and he approached me to act as art director, lay the paper out. And I said, well, I agreed to that. I'd come down one day a week, one day a month, to lay out the paper and any ads. There weren't too many ads back then, at that time. And Lew Dietz wrote for it, and Carl (*name sounds like: Costerahoma*) would supply a photograph once in a while. They had boat diagrams, let's see, who was, there were two or three marine architects here in Camden, but and I can't think of their names. Anyway, I did that, I got

acquainted with Owen, and I thought Owen was one of the really great guys, we got along very well.

**ES:** Well, when did he start *Outdoor Maine*?

**WS:** Well, what happened there was that he had some sort of contract with the owner of the *Journal*, of the *Belfast Journal*, Brace, Rusty Brace is the son, and Owen thought that he had an option to buy the paper once it was established. But evidently, old man Brace thought that the paper could be a valuable asset, and something, I don't know what happened, but Owen was left -

**ES:** Out in the cold.

**WS:** Out in the cold. And when he started, he said, "Well, I can still do something," and he started a paper called *Outdoor Maine* and, but it only ran for about three copies, three issues. And he asked me to design that for, lay that out for him, which I did. But that fell apart. But I can remember he said, "There's just nothing, I can't, I just can't do anything here. I can't get enough advertising to keep the thing going and I'm going to have to file for bankruptcy," he said, "but you know, there's still four hundred dollars in the kitty. And I'm going to give it to you as payment," he said, "because you've done all this work on the papers and you haven't been paid that much." And I said, "Well, you know, four hundred dollars, that's a lot of money." He said, "It would just disappear anyway," he said, "and it's perfectly proper for me to pay it to somebody who has done the work." So I got a check for four hundred dollars, and that was really pretty rough. Do you want all this stuff about Owen?

**AL:** Yes.

**WS:** And then, well that folded. He had a couple of backers here in town who lost whatever money they put in. But then Owen still wanted to do, be in the publishing thing. And *Downeast*, which was started by Doolittle, Dwayne Doolittle, there was a rumor that Dwayne wanted to sell. So Owen got in touch with him and they came, they agreed on a price. As I remember, it was ninety thousand dollars. And Owen came to me and said, "I'm taking over *Downeast* magazine, I'd like you to be the art director," you know, that kind of thing. And I said, "Well that sounds great," but that fell apart because Dwayne didn't really own the paper, the money came from his wife's family And his wife's father, evidently, put up, put the money up, said, "Well, you set a price of ninety thousand but you haven't done anything about," what do you call it, capital gains tax or something like that. He said, "You're selling the paper too low," (the magazine). So Doolittle backed out of that. And Owen was in quite a state, but then that's when they moved down to Washington.

**ES:** Well, you know, she's going to get all this from Joan.

**WS:** Yeah, you'll get that from Joan, I believe. But I had a very good relationship with Owen.

**AL:** What kind of a person was he, to describe him to me who doesn't know him?

**WS:** Well, he had a lot of built-in tension, you know, which -

**ES:** Which didn't show because he was always very entertaining.

**WS:** Which didn't show, he was always, you know, very upbeat, very entertaining, always had some wonderful stories. I don't know if you want to tell Joan this one. When they moved, they must have been living up in the Belfast area so, I'm not sure about that because it seems to me Owen had a job with the *Portland Press Herald* so they may have been down in Portland. When they moved up this way anyway, they bought the big old farmhouse up in Melvin Heights, the one that you'll be seeing Joanne in. And it needed paint, it needed quite a lot of work, but it needed painting anyway. So, I don't think Owen had any real color sense because he picked up one of these color chips, you know, that you get in the paint department, and they're about this size. And he picked up one that was a sort of pretty pink, you know, he thought, 'gee, this is really nice'. And I took a look at this thing and I thought to myself, 'does he realize that when this thing is magnified one thousand times what it's going to look like?'

Well anyway, he went ahead and ordered the paint and a couple of guys to come and do the painting. And these two guys showed up, you know, back then, seven o'clock, the workers get out, they slam the ladder up against the wall, and one of the guys down below is opening one of these paint buckets and he says, "Jesus Christ, he wants this paint, this color, on the whole house?" And the other guy says, "Just do the painting." And this guy says, "Well, if he wants to have his house, if he wants to paint his house like a whorehouse, that's up to him, we just go ahead and do it." And evidently, the bedroom window was open and Owen heard this talk outside. He raced over to the window and said, "Stop! Paint it white." Anyway, now there again, you see, I'm not sure just how active Owen was in the political area, you know, whether he was a real dynamo in Muskie's campaigns or just like us a Democrat who was -

**ES:** Well, actually he was more active than we were.

**WS:** Yeah, I'm pretty sure, just like Lew Dietz was. But I didn't, we didn't really pay any attention to that much.

**AL:** And Lew Dietz, was he a writer by profession?

**ES:** Yes.

**WS:** Yes, yeah.

**AL:** Because I know his name from different Maine writings.

**ES:** And he wrote a series of boy's books called the Jeff White, Jeff White, Young Fireman, Jeff White, Young Lumberman and so forth. My son read all of those. And then he wrote The Allagash.

**AL:** Yes, yes, that's where I -

**ES:** And he wrote -



**WS:** And he wrote one called -

**ES:** What's the one, Wiscasset? Night Train From Wiscasset?

**WS:** Night Train From Wiscasset. And of course he wrote a lot of stuff for *Downeast*.

**AL:** Didn't he write the André book?

**ES:** Yes.

**WS:** Oh yes, yes.

**AL:** André the seal?

**ES:** Which I illustrated.

**WS:** Yeah, Stell illustrated that.

**AL:** Oh, I have wonderful memories from my childhood of André the seal [André died in 1986].

**ES:** Uh-huh. Did you go to see him do his tricks?

**AL:** Every year. They were right in Camden here.

**ES:** In Rockport.

**AL:** Rockport.

**WS:** He got to be a damn nuisance.

**ES:** We lived next door to Harry Goodridge [died April, 1990] for a while when we moved over to Rockport, lived there for seven years, we could walk down to the harbor.

**AL:** That's what I was trying to remember. I knew the family and we would come visit them. One of the sons was near my age, and they would take us to see André. That was -

**WS:** Yeah, Harry put on these, what would you call it?

**ES:** Shows.

**WS:** Shows, in the harbor. And I can remember, it got so that, it got a bit out of hand, you know. I can remember walking downtown, and this guy came up to me and said, "Where's André's office?" And I said, "André's office?" He said, "Yeah, I wrote him a letter and I'm going to talk to him because he never replied." And I thought -

**ES:** Well, when our grandchildren would come to visit us over there, they always walked down to the harbor to see André. And now of course there's that wonderful statue of André over there that was done by a friend of ours, Jane Wasey.

**AL:** Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you think that we should add to this interview today? Or do you think I've done way too much in my questions?

**WS:** I think there's an awful lot of stuff here and there's damn little about Muskie.

**AL:** Do you have any thoughts or perspectives, you know, just observing from a distance, Ed Muskie? Over the years, observing Ed Muskie, do you have any long distance perspective of him?

**ES:** I wish he could have been president, I think he would have been a wonderful president.

**WS:** Well, he was one of those rare individuals who got into Congress, an honest politician. And when I, over the years, when I think of what the citizens of this country, the people they have put into high office, I'm appalled. You know, we have put so many clowns into high office. Not only clowns, crooks, amoral operators. I think, you know, to know somebody, even you might say at a distance as we knew Muskie, to know one guy who made it to Congress who was honest and, what do you call it, more than honest, who really had a moral conscience.

**AL:** Integrity?

**WS:** Integrity, yes.

**ES:** Integrity, that's the word.

**WS:** That's heartening.

**ES:** And he wasn't a millionaire, he didn't have the money to buy his way into it.

**AL:** One last question. I mean, you came to Maine and you came to this area when it was very strong Republican, and we've seen that change dramatically since Ed Muskie first ran for governor. It's a very Democratic state now.

**WS:** Yeah, overall it is.

**AL:** Yeah.

**WS:** But please remember that right here it's still pretty solidly Republican.

**ES:** Well, all our friends are Democrats, I can only think of one that isn't.

**WS:** Well, that's true. All you have to do is look at the results of the last couple of elections.

**AL:** I just wondered if you saw, if you had friends who became Democrats, what was, did you see the process happen with people you knew?

**WS:** No, I guess what happened actually was you sort of gravitate to the people who are on your own wavelength.

**ES:** Thought wave, yeah.

**AL:** Okay, well thank you very much.

*End of Interview*