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Butera, Charles oral history interview

Jeremy Robitaille

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Interview with Charles Butera by Jeremy Robitaille

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Butera, Charles

Interviewer

Robitaille, Jeremy

Date

June 11, 2001

Place

Hermon, Maine

ID Number

MOH 279

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Biographical Note

Charles Thomas Butera was born in Bangor, Maine on May 6, 1923 to Carmella (Capascagno) and Lorenzo Butera. His parents were Sicilian immigrants who came to the United States in the early 1900s. Charlie grew up on Hancock Street in Bangor, attended John Bapst High School, and graduated from Bangor High School with the class of 1941. He enlisted in the Navy, and served from 1941 to 1945. When he returned from the service, he worked until he could buy an apartment building. When he was able to save a little more, he began operating a restaurant in Bangor. He eventually owned seventeen rental properties in the Bangor area. He became involved with the Democratic Party in Maine, and was a key organizer in the predominantly Republican Penobscot County of Maine. After fourteen years of activism, he became frustrated with party activities. Although remaining Democrat, he stopped his involvement in Maine party politics.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: Democratic Party in Penobscot County; building the Democratic Party; Baldacci family; Bob Baldacci; Maine Democratic Party in the 1950s; Hancock Street in Bangor; diversity in Bangor; opinions on the Democratic Party in 2001; Ed

Muskie; John Barry; Dick and Madelin Kiah; Joe Binnette; Frank Coffin; traits of a good leader; John Baldacci; and Bill Cohen.

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Charles Butera: . . . good turnout. And then that, and I wrote articles to the *Bangor Daily News*. At that time Kalil Ayoob was the desk, city editor, and he was good with me, he was a good boy. And any time I'd bring anything to him, especially in them years when everything was Republican, you know, nobody, Democrat was a dirty word, really and truly. So he printed, I have a scrapbook here with, from the getting up to a point here, see, 'Democrats ask for recount on the vote ballot', and then, here, this is Cox right here, that's Eddie Cox right there. He passed away years ago.

Jeremy Robitaille: Okay, here's you and, who's this?

CB: I think her name was Bamford, I can't remember. She was, she worked for the city, but, her picture should be here, her name could be here. Katherine, yeah, Katherine Marsden, she was a county committeewoman. Then from there I went to organize the good Democratic committee, and we had a meeting in Lewiston, state Democratic committee meeting, and went to that. And would you believe by that time I had about seven or eight fellows that come with me to the caucus in Lewiston? I believe it was Lewiston. And one of the fellows says, "I'm going to nominate you for chairman of county committee." I says, "I don't want to be county committee chairman." He says, "Oh, we got the most people here so we might as well nominate you for it." Well, they had, it was firmly entrenched at that time by the Democrats in Old Town, because they were the only ones that paid attention to the Democratic Party. But we had Alex Latno, he was the rep, a hell of a good boy, he was a representative, and then there were a couple or three fellows, Paul Dufour and Joe Binnette, they were on the committee. But they had about five or six at that committee, but we had about eight or nine. So Mark nominated me as chairman of the city committee, so, I mean of the county committee, and of course that was seconded, and I had the votes, I had one extra vote, so I become county committeeman.

Then we got back into Bangor and they was raising a stink because they wanted to have a reelection, because it wasn't fair, there weren't enough people there. So this time we had maybe about fifty or sixty people, and they had, there was (*name sounds like: Razor Crosbin*), God rest his soul, he was also being nominated, and I think Alex Latno was nominated because he was a prior county committeeman. So, then I was nominated. Well, at a point there, of course, we had it in Brewer and I had the strength because that was my area there, so Razor said, well I want, no, Alex said, no Razor says, "I'll throw my votes to Latno, so all you people that vote for me vote for him." Well, I got in there by one vote to become chairman of the committee.

So then, at that time, prior to that I was chairman of the city committee, and Bob Baldacci, John Baldacci's father, was the vice chairman. So I told him, I says, "I'm going to run for, I was nominated for chairman and so you take over the chairmanship of the city committee and I'll just take care of this here." So he was, I think he was a year or so on the city committee. Then I wanted him to be with me on the county committee, so Dale (or Jay?) Lockland, God rest his soul, he, I told him, I says, "When the time comes," I says, "I want you to nominate Bob Baldacci for vice chairman of the county committee." He says, "Okay, Charlie." So he gets up and he says, "I'd like to nominate Bob 'Badakki' for vice chairman." I'll never forget that, really and truly. Instead of Baldacci. I says, "It was Baldacci." "Well, how do you pronounce it?" I says, "Forget it. So everyone knew the name and he got it anyway. So we went from there.

Then, I was in there for about two terms I guess, then I become committeeman, state committeeman from Penobscot County. And I was there for about a couple of terms. And we were, I was an alternate to the Chicago convention, national convention.

JR: In '68, right?

CB: In '68, yeah. And that's how it, we had, I don't know, I dare say, I organized something like fifty-four towns that never had any Democrats at all in there. They had people in there, but they had no committees, no nothing, so we organized committees and chairmen and so forth. Then the first year, I had one person in Penobscot County, nobody in the city of Bangor running for the legislature, and it looked lousy, you know. You read the, go over to the Republican side and you see seventeen names, you know, plus four names from Bangor, at that time there was four legislators from Bangor, and one Democrat on the whole sheet of paper. So I run around hassling and hustling, getting people, like I told them, "Well just give me a name, that's all I want, you know, just so, allow me to put your name on the ballot." Well I'll never make it. Well, regardless of whether you win, it looks a lot better to find that Republicans do have a little bit opposition. So I did, after about a couple of years I did fill the ticket up, we had seventeen members there. And in fact, one of them there from Lagrange, he got elected. Of course Ba-, Old Town always had elected him, they always had a Democrat, Alex Latno was in there for years. So that's how it transpired over there, on that there.

Then after that, we, well I continued with the Democratic Party for about twelve or fourteen years and devoted ninety-nine point nine percent of my time to the Democratic Party. And I swear that if I had devoted that same amount of time to myself, I would have been sitting pretty today, I'd have been a multi-millionaire. And I'm not joking. Just between you and I, I am a millionaire right now. But this was all after, after twelve years of the fruitful years being taken away for the Democratic Party, and what did I receive from the Democratic Party? That, a big fat zero, you know? And this is the thing, I'm not too happy with the Democratic Party, never have been ever since that, you know.

I have nothing against the people that are running, now especially, now that John Baldacci, to give you a good example. John, I remember him as an infant, as a baby, when he was born, you know, because his father and I we chummed around together. And my wife and I always used to

go over and visit him at the home there at that time, you know. And all the boys, even Bobby, the oldest boy, I remember him as an infant, you know. So we go back a long ways. And I think that had, because like John would tell me, he'd be sitting up there, upstairs, laying in bed there and listening to Bob and I discuss the Democratic Party, so it may have had a little influence on him. Now the result is that Peter is an attorney, and he's county commissioner, and then his brother Joey, him I don't know too well because he's just, he was the, well, he was born maybe about five or six years later, you know. But Joey, he's on the city council, so all of them have done well politically, you know. Thank God for that. And they're all good boys, every one of them, very, very good boys. The only one that never delved in politics was Bobby, you know. But he's a hell of a good boy, he went into development instead, you know, which I think he took the best route, to be honest to God truthful with you. Because it, it is, it creates a lot of bitterness, you know.

I was one bitter person for a while, until I got, I said to myself, "I can't get any more bitter than this." So all it was, all that time now, busting my hump, nothing but a wart healer, a glorified wart healer, you know what I mean? I wrote, I was just going through my annals here, there's twelve letters here that I wrote to His Holiness, Ed Muskie, asking for a little bit of help with something. Every one of them were rejections. Well, they want this, well it's up to the council, or something this, at that time we had the council. But you know, that's a lot of bullshit, just between you and I, because you could say, "Well, I want so and so in there." Well let's see, well I don't think we want him in there. Okay, but you won't get your man in there. When his name comes up, I'm going to axe it, you know what I mean? So that's well, and he'll go on. But everyone that was affiliated with the Democratic Party that were kissing ass with him got what they wanted. But I wasn't that kind of a person.

On his second, at that time, it was two years, elected two years as governor, and this was the first time since Governor Brann was in office that we had a [Democratic] governor. And on the day prior to that, it was on a Sunday, he had to have the names in by Monday, I had garnered something like ten thousand names on a petition for him to run as governor, you know. So I brought it over to Waterville, these things you don't lay away, they stay right with you, I brought it over to Waterville, and they had a little small house there, that's when he was an attorney, and I knocked on the door and he's in there with a couple of buddies of his, you know, drinking booze, you know. And, "Ed," I says, "I got your papers." Yeah, okay, wait a minute, I'll be right out. Didn't have the common decency to say, well, step in, come in, you know. And yet, I knew Don Nicoll was there as one of them, and another guy, no it wasn't Don Nicoll, it wasn't Don Nicoll. This kid was from Waterville, this kid was from Waterville. Of course he's not a kid any more, he's still alive, but he was, he became, he got an appointment as a chairman of the committee, you know, that was an elected committee, what is it, that committee there? My- had a tiff with them once. The committee that has to do with monopolies, there. Public- Public Utilities Commission, is it?

JR: Perhaps, I'm not sure, but okay, Public Utilities.

CB: Yeah, that's what it is. But they had, whenever the electric companies wanted to come up for a raise or something, increase in the wage and increase in the things there, they would have to

go to the commission and that had to authorize it, you know. So he became ch-, not a chair, I don't think a chair, but he was a member of that. Anyway, he got, he took care of those that he wanted to take care of, you know. But you wouldn't believe the amount of time, truly wouldn't believe the amount of time that I spent with the Democratic Party in organizing it in this area alone. And as I said, I think, I think we organized I think something like fifty-two or fifty-four towns that never had anything in there, you know. But like I said, the important thing is whether we make it or not, that's not so important. The important thing is to put before the public the fact that there is such a thing as a Democratic Party in the state of Maine. Well, you see what the results are. The Democratic Party has taken over now, now the Democrats are on the top and Republicans are on the bottom. And whether that's a good thing or not, I really don't know, that's the honest to God truth. But this is a good example here. This is Alex Lapneau right there.

JR: Okay, yeah, all the way to the right.

CB: These are, this is a scrapbook that I had when I was -

JR: Involved in it?

CB: And this is another scrapbook here, that I have here. These are the letters -

JR: Wow, you really kept track of everything.

CB: Oh yes, I did. And these are the letters I received, I got twelve letters from Muskie, six letters from Frank Coffin, one from Roger Dube, one from Steve Mitchell, one from senator from Georgia, Richard Russell, and four from Ken Curtis, one from Dennis Roberts, he was the governor of Rhode Island, and one from Jim Oliver, three from Bill Hathaway, five from Bill Hathaway, one from Estes Kefauver, one from Averill Harriman, and three from Clinton Clauson, one from Adlai Stevenson, and one from John Kennedy, he was senator of Massachusetts at that time there. In fact, he sent me, he used to send me a card every year. Of course that was political, but I got a beautiful picture of him and his wife here that he sent me also for Christmas, you know, when he was a senator. That was before he was elected governor, I mean elected president.

And so the result was that after all this time and all this work, and all this depriving myself of the niceties, devoted to the Democratic Party, I received absolutely nothing, you know. Not even a thank you. In fact, speaking of His Holiness, when we got, we had a rally here in Bangor one time, that's when Jim, Jim Oliver was congressman, you know. And of course you had, the thing is that, I was disturbed about his, what's more important, for you to give him ten bucks, or for you to give him a hundred hours, you know what I mean? You can't buy a hundred hours, even at a buck an hour then, that's a hundred bucks, you see what I mean? But no matter how much work was done, it was past, it didn't mean for nothing. But all those that give him a hundred bucks or ten bucks or twenty bucks, they all got recognition. So one time we were at this rally and he got up and made a big speech there, and he says, I want to thank so and so, and I thank so and so, I thank so and so. Never any mention of Charlie Butera. So then Jim Oliver got up and he mentioned how appreciative he was for everything I had done for him, because he was

running, and he was from the first district now, nothing to do with me. So, and then he told me, he says, "I was just so upset," he says, "that for all you did for him that he wouldn't say one good word about you, you know." He says, "So I just had to step in and I had to say something." you know. Even though I had nothing to do with him in that first district, you know. But these things are upsetting, you know.

And then all the letters I wrote to him, and finally, finally I think after about two or three years, of course things were hard then, I was making peanuts, absolutely nothing, I mean nothing, but nothing. So I tried to apply for a position. Every position, either I was, whether the qualifications were there or not he didn't know, but the important thing is that it had to be accepted by the council. So he would give it to the council. If I asked him a question about something pertaining to something else, like the state was taking (*unintelligible word*) my father's farm, I wrote him when he was senator about that, and he said he'll send it to the proper sources and they'll take care of it.

I had a friend of mine that I grew up with that was a Polish gent by descent. And he was in WWII and he got bombed, he was a bomber, navigated a bomber. He got dropped twice. And the second time, he didn't break his leg but it was, he couldn't use it, he had to have a cane and stilts on the damn thing. So he wanted to get into Togus, and he wanted to know if there was anything, because at that time I was still with the Democratic Party, if there was anything I could do to help him, you know. I says, "Well I'll write a letter to Ed," you know, and see, "where you're especially a countryman, maybe he'll do something for you." So I write a beautiful letter to Ed, tell him about this friend of mine. This, all this is true. He and his brother, when the war broke out, they had a service station. At that time that was big stuff, you know. They sold the service station and jumped into the service to fight for their country. Then, this is what happened to Joe, and now he's got to go to Togus because it's bothering him something fierce and they can't seem to find a bed for him, you know. So he writes me back and he says, "Well," he said, "I don't know why he can't write to me himself, why you have to write." Because I told him he was of Polish descent, same background and everything, and he come from the same type of living, I mean he came, poor section you know, like your father and yourself, you know. "So," he says, "if he's interested why don't he write for himself?" In the meantime, I had written one to Margaret Chase Smith also, but not mentioning the fact that he was Polish or anything like that, just what he'd done for his country. Well, she wrote back, and she says, "I appreciate that you're taking that interest in this friend of yours, Mr. Butera, and you tell your friend that there is a bed waiting for him at Togus right now." She called them right up and got a bed for him. And I says, so, so he says to me, "Can I have these letters, Charlie?" And I says, "Sure, Joe." I says, here, I says, I give him the one from Chase Smith, you know. And he says, "Could I have the one from Muskie, too?" I says, "What do you want to do with that?" He says, "I want to wipe my ass with it." That's a fact, this is the God honest truth, you know.

But, and it's funny how life is, but he went to Togus and he wasn't admitted immediately. Like I say, he was, he could get around with it, it was just under severe pain, so they told him that he couldn't, he had a sister lived there, Augusta, he'd go visit his sister and be back about five o'clock and they'd be all ready for him, you know. He was walking across the street there, the main street there, and he got hit and it killed him. So, that's too bad, how things happen.

But this is, these things, the ramifications are twofold, when you get right down to it. Especially they have been with me. I mean, I know that a lot have done things for the Democratic Party and they've gotten something back. But all I put in was time and money, you know, and got absolutely nothing. And that's why I'm not too enthused with the Democratic Party. I've been a staunch Democrat, but that's principle, that has nothing to do with conditions, you know. And I have been ever since, actually ever since I was child because my father, he was a Democrat, and my mother was, and I guess given the background that I was in, it was a Democratic background at that time. So I've always been involved with the Democratic Party, and I still think it's a great party, although we're getting a lot of jackasses in there now. And I'll be honest with you, as far as [William J.] Clinton is concerned, I did not vote for Clinton, neither time. I don't care for that type of individuals, you know. It's too bad. And I didn't vote for [Albert] Gore either, for the simple reason that he was a henchman, you know. And even though, so I'm a little older and a hell of a lot wiser now than I was then, and I thought, you bust your ass and you do something to help the other person, when the time comes and you're down and out he'll be right up here to give you a helping hand. But that's the other way around. When the time come to help out, he's right there to shove you deeper into the ditch, you know. This is what's discouraging.

And that's the way life is anyway, you know, I just didn't understand that at that time. I thought that you did good, well my mother, God rest her soul, always taught me, you do good and people will reciprocate and do good to you. But it's not really that way. Same thing as, I was taught to be honest, and that's the route to go to. But then again, you wonder. The guys like this [Timothy] McVeigh, he's going to be a hero, you know. They just killed him, he finally got euthanized, but look at all he's done and look at, who's paying for the lawyers that he's got now, at about two hundred dollars an hour? We're paying for it. Why? Why? The guy's guilty. He wanted to die, now they want to, it's a wonder, I didn't think they were going to kill him, I thought they'd carry it on and on and on, you know. But this is the way our system is today. And it's up to people like yourself to make the changes, and I hope that you're wise enough to study the past and find out what transpired.

It's like, one thing is, there's no reason why we should have wars today. If anybody could read or write and they find out, read especially, and they read the books, history books way back to ancient times and saw what is garnered by all these wars, just, life, I mean life's being taken away and then they find out it's not worth it. A life's not worth a few shekels that they're going to pick up. But they're still doing it. Nobody learns, you know. The power of the buck is unforeseeable, unforeseeable. But it's something I guess you have to live with.

That's what discourages me, is that people don't, really don't understand. And one of my philosophies is that there are ten thousand individuals, of the ten thousand you got one brilliant individual, and of that same ten thousand you've got maybe a hundred intelligent individuals, and all the others are just trash, they're just ignorant fools who go along with what you say. "Hey, vote for this." "Why?" "Because I'm telling you." "Oh, okay." You know what I mean? You don't know what you're doing, you don't know what you're doing. Or else, like down South there, they give him a cigarette, say, here, vote for so and so, it's vote for Gore, here's a cigarette. So they vote for Gore. Gee, I don't know. But that's the way life is, that's the way it is.

But as far as Ed Muskie, I've known him ever since he first started, and I was very impressed with the man in the very beginning because I thought he would make a good leader, but then I come to, especially because of his back problems, I come to find out that he was just like the rest of them. Once he got to get in there, they tell him, "Ed, forget the people you know, go with us, stay with us, the big wheels, you know, and just shaft the rest of them." And that's what he did. Me especially, me he did shaft, really and truly.

JR: When did you first meet him, like when was your first interaction with him?

CB: Oh, back in the forties, back in the forties.

JR: Really, when he was in the legislature, or before that?

CB: Yeah, he was in the legislature then, yes. Then he decided, I think it was, what was it, '5-, '48 when he was elected the first year, I think?

JR: No, maybe '46.

CB: It may have been '50.

JR: Are you talking about for governor?

CB: Maybe '50, yeah, the first time.

JR: For governor it was '54.

CB: It was '54 then?

JR: Yeah, yeah.

CB: Okay. Well, I met him before that, because I was, it was in the forties that I was chairman of the city committee, and that's when I started building up the Democratic Party in Penobscot County. And fortunately the other counties followed suit and did the same thing, you know, otherwise we couldn't have done it with Penobscot County alone. But that's the first time that we ever elected a governor in Penobscot County for years and years and years and years, you know. But it was through hard work, you know, and a lot of interested individuals that believed that was a future in the Democratic Party. And it was no easy thing to convince them, you know, and especially when you had nothing to offer them, you know, all you're going to get out of it is to say that you belong to the same party as the governor belongs to, that's all, you know. But no reward, nothing I could offer them. And in fact, as far as money was concerned I, what I did my first year as the chairman of the local committee, city committee, I went around to all those that had been firmly entrenched, that were in there when Brann nominated them for positions, federal positions and so forth, and I dunned them for a few bucks. I got a hundred bucks from Connors, and a hundred bucks from, I can't remember her name now, she was a clerk of courts. And they

come along good, you know.

JR: Was it Catherine Hickson?

CB: Hickson, Catherine Hickson, that's right. And, like, who was it, who was the marshal. Was it Connors?

JR: I'm not sure.

CB: Anyway, the marshal there, he told me, he says, "Here's a hundred bucks, Charlie," he says, "put it in your pocket and spend it," he says, "because that's the most you'll ever get out of the damn Democratic Party." But by God, he was right. And I says, yeah, that's a week. So we put it in the kitty there and placed advertisements and so forth for the candidates who were running for public office, you know. But I didn't look for anything for myself. I know there was two or three people that were applying for positions at the, federal positions, one was a mail carrier, rural carrier, you know. And so I could have just put my name in there and said the hell with them, you know, but I wrote in and, for him, you know, and he got the job. But I figured just, well, I'll work hard, form a good party and everything, then when it's all firmly then maybe my time will come. But it never came, it never came. You can't understand the bitterness that it creates in an individual when you see this one getting ahead and that one getting ahead and you're still foundering around at fifteen cents an hour, you know. But that's what's, as far as Ed Muskie is concerned, I can't say, I can't truly say a good word for him.

One year when he was going for the second, uh, for reelection -

JR: For governor, in '56?

CB: For governor, yeah, he, we, Bob Baldacci was at East Millinocket. We did a good job in getting all of the towns organized so that they had a good rally there for him when he come through, had it all figured out and everything. Myself and the committee worked for days to get that all set up. So Bob Baldacci was over to East Millinocket, they had about two hundred people there, you know. And next thing I know, I get a phone call from Bob and he says, "Charlie, where the hell's Ed?" I said, "Well he should be along any minute now, Bob," you know. I'm up here in Millinocket at the banquet, you know, they have a big banquet there, and all of a sudden in walks Ed Muskie. I says, "You been down to East Millinocket yet?" "No," he says, "I'm too tired." I says, "Bullshit you're too tired, you get your ass back there." I says, "There's two or three hundred Democrats down there waiting for you," I said, "It's not going to look good if they get teed off and the press finds out." Well, he was too busy or too tired to come up here. So he went, he says, "Okay," told the state cop, "let's go." So John and I, God rest his soul, he told me, he says, "Do you know that that was the governor of Maine?" I says, "No, not today, today he's a candidate for governor of Maine. Yesterday he was governor, tomorrow he'll be governor, today when he's here in Penobscot County, he's campaigning, he's a candidate for governor of Maine, and he better do it right," you know. Now I said, we got two hundred people, Bob's sitting over there with two hundred people, holding them together because the governor's supposed to be coming in, you know, he kept making excuses. Well, he's on his way,

I just called up, he's on the way. Finally he made it down there. He got reelected.

But they were so shocked that I took that attitude with him. Well, the only thing is I figure that maybe that's why I never got anyplace with him, because I treated him like a human being, like another individual. I didn't treat him as a god or anything like that. To me he was, my mother taught me one thing, she says, "Charlie," she said, "never ever look up to any man because no man is better than you are." But in the same sentence she said, "Never, ever look down to any man because no man, no matter if he's drunk and groveling he's no, he's just as good as you are. So don't go thinking that you're better than him and kicking him. You look straight them in the eyes, all of them, they're all equal, everybody's equal." And I've never forgotten that. And I never allowed any son of a bitch that would come up and say to me, well, I'm bigger than you, because nobody is bigger than me, nobody is and never will be (*unintelligible phrase*).

I remember one time there I had, I made a bid for a piece of property in Bangor and I was the winning bidder. So this fellow, a friend of mine, told me, he says, "Gee, it's too bad you lost that bid." I said, "What do you mean I lost that bid?" I says, "I was the highest bidder on that." He says, "No," he says, "one guy come in there and he had the same bid as you." So I says, "You're crazy." So I went down to City Hall, and the purchasing agent was the one that did all this, you know, and I says, "How come?" I says, "That," oh, he was sitting up there [*points up*]. And I says, "By the way, come down off your pedestal and come down here and talk to me eye to eye," I says, "I'm not going to look up to no son of a bitch," you know. So he came down, and I says, "How come that he got the bid with exactly the same amount of money as I did?" He says, "Well, you both, and I says, he wasn't even there to protect his bid." And so, well, he had a letter that he had sent out two weeks before yours, you know, and it was the very same price. I says, well how come that he got it? Well, the committee tossed a coin, and he got the bid. So I went to the committee meetings for about three or four times on that and every, this is God's truth, every time that I was there they tabled it for the next meeting. So that, finally that meeting, I happened to have gotten the flu, I didn't go there, and all of these people in that area went over in my behalf, they pushed it in when I was gone, they didn't have the guts to do it with me there, you know. Because it's atrocious how things are, you know, and that's probably because you're trying to be an honest man, you know, and you wonder now where's it getting you. Of course, I can't complain, there's a good Lord that's been good with me, you know, and I'm well-to-do right now, got set up perfectly, I don't need anything. But stop to think is how much more I would have had, and how much deprivation I would have, I pride myself (*interruption*), and the deprivation, the things that we deprived ourselves of, my wife and I, trying to make ends meet, you know, trying to get things together and invest wisely and properly so that in our old age we'd have something to fall back on.

You know what I get a month for Social Security?

JR: Well, you may not want, like, the tape's running so you don't have to, you don't have to tell that to me.

CB: You know what I get for Social Security?

JR: You can keep that with yourself.

CB: Three hundred and ninety-one dollars a month. You know what she gets? A hundred and ninety-three. So imagine trying to live on that today. See, if I hadn't spent a little time on myself, where the hell, you think I could go to the Democratic Party now and say, look, I'm only getting five hundred dollars a month and I got to have some help. They'd say, well tough, tough, you know?

JR: Well, if you'd, I'd really like to kind of start with your childhood if we could, like talk about you for a while and then kind of talk about Bangor. So, you know, just for, to be official, this is June 11th, 2001, we're at the home of Charles T. Butera in Herman, Maine, and interviewing is Jeremy Robitaille. And first, just for the record, could you state your full name and spell it?

CB: Charles Thomas Butera. The last, this is B-U-T-E-R-A.

JR: Excellent. And when and where were you born?

CB: I was born in Bangor, May 5th, 1923.

JR: And what were your parents' names?

CB: Well, my father's name was Lorenzo Butera, and my mother's maiden name was Carmela Capascagno.

JR: Could you spell that please?

CB: C-A-P-A-S-C-A-G-N-O.

JR: And how did they come to live in Bangor?

CB: Well, my father's brother, this is the truth, too, he had two older brothers and they came to Bangor before he got here. In fact, one of them, my Uncle Ray, he started the seltzers. He had a soda, bottling, on Hazel Street in Bangor, and he had a bottling company and they had bottled soda, seltzer, with the seltzer, prior to that they didn't have that. So he started that in Bangor. And then my Uncle Joe came down and they worked together, and they bought a farm in Carmel, Maine, and it was about a hundred, I think it was a hundred and fifty-two acres, the original purchase. And my father came down, from Italy, from Sicily, and they talked him into buying the farm. So he bought the farm, and they sold their place in Bangor and they went back to Brooklyn and stayed in Brooklyn. So we were stuck here, and all my relatives are all from Brooklyn.

JR: And how about your mother?

CB: My mother, she was, she lived, they both lived in the same town. So after my father was

here, I think it was nineteen either eleven or thirteen that he came here. But he called for her anyway, and in 1922 she came from Italy, by herself on the ship. And I was born in 1923.

JR: Okay, so where, were you, were there a lot of like Sicilian and Italian immigrants who came to the Bangor area, because Baldacci's also -

CB: No, no, Baldacci's not Sicilian.

JR: Okay, but is he Italian?

CB: Oh yes, he's Italian, yeah. I think there's, I don't whether it's Neopolitan or what it is. But anyway, no, there was only one or two other Sicilians in Bangor at that time, and then they were from (*name*), and from Napoli, and from Rome and from all over. But I came from Hancock Street, and I'd say Hancock Street was the melting pot of the City of Bangor. And anyone that was of a foreign make up or so, ended up on Hancock Street. And you had, I think we had a lot of Polish people, a lot of Lithuanians, a lot of Russians, and we had Jews. All of the Jews from Bangor settled on Hancock Street in the very beginning, you know. That's why I, I learned an awful lot because when I was a kid this friend of mine, he was an Italian boy, and he and I were the only two that belonged to the center, the Jewish center. And they were all Jews in there. Because we associated with a lot of the Jewish kids, you know, we grew up with them, you know. And that's one thing that we never had there was race discrimination. No discrimination at all, we were all, we had Frenchmen, we had Irishmen, we had Scotsmen, we had everything, everything you could think of was there on that street, you know. And not only one of them, but a half a dozen of them, you know what I mean?

And we were all one great big, in fact we were one family (*unintelligible phrase*) serving girl there, well she's a woman now, she lived right next door to me. And one day when I had the restaurant she come in and she had a, years and years ago, she had this boyfriend with her. She says, "I want you to meet Charlie Butera, he's one of us, he's a member of the family." And he says, "Oh, you're Syrian?" I says, "No, I'm Italian." She says, "No, he comes from Hancock Street. We're all one big family." And that is true. And I know another one is Jim Mooney, God rest his soul, his sister lived up on the further part of Hancock Street where it isn't so difficult, you know. And instead of coming up State Street and coming down to go home, she'd come up Hancock Street for the simple reason, she said, that she wouldn't have to worry about anybody molesting her or anything. So she'd come up Hancock Street. Anybody give her a hard time, there was always somebody there to protect her. So she felt secure coming up Hancock Street rather than coming up State Street. See what I mean? Because State Street was a busier place, and they had a better class of people there, so-called, you see. But this is where the background started.

First job I had, I was the envy of the neighborhood, I worked in the butcher shop. I was about fourteen or fifteen years old, and I was making three dollars a week. Then the second job I had, I worked for my godfather, I was working eighty hours a week and I was getting ten bucks a week. And I was playing football at the same time. And, you know, we say, well you can't go, I went to Bapst, was playing football for Bapst, and then we had a skull practice coming up that

night so I told the coach, I says, I can't make it to skull practice because my godfather told me that I could play football, but during the afternoon only, not at night, you know. So I says, "I'll have one of the fellows get the plays and everything and explain them to me." He says, "Well, I don't think we want to do that," he says, "if you can't make it, turn in your uniform." He says, "We don't want any Hancock Street bums on our team anyway." And I says, "Okay buster, you can stuff it."

So I went right over to see, I was going to John Bapt , I said to him, I says, "I would like to transfer to Bangor High." "Why?" And I told him. He says, "Well, I'll talk to this guy." I said, well let's be honest about this, I mean, you're going to talk to him. Oh yeah, we were, Eddie Maroon and myself, he was a Syrian kid, and Eddie and I was out tossing a ball back and forth, away from the group, you know. And captain Foley come over to me, he says, what were you guys doing (*unintelligible phrase*), he would say, what are you doing over here, playing out here, why don't you get in there with them? I says, well, they want us to, (*unintelligible phrase*), you know? And they played for Bapst, they were good players, you know. So that got me a little upset when I started analyzing the whole situation. So I says, "Brother, you think for one minute that he's going to do anything for me?" The first thing he's going to say is, well, we're not in there playing because we're not capable of doing it, you know. He says, "Well, maybe you're right." I says, "You better give me a transfer. I'll go to Bangor High School where I'll be accepted," you know. And I went to Bangor High, that's where I graduated. In fact I just, that's where I was (*unintelligible phrase*). I was at the 60th, we're working on our 60th anniversary.

JR: That's incredible. What were your parents' political views. I mean, you said that they were Democrats?

CB: They were voters, Democrats, yeah.

JR: And how about religious views?

CB: Catholic, Roman Catholic.

JR: Okay, and like outside of voting, were they, did they get involved in the community?

CB: No.

JR: No, stayed out of it.

CB: No, they were too poor then. And if you were poor then you didn't belong to anything. The only thing you associated with your own, you know, and that would be the conversations, you know. My mother used to have a lot of her friends visit her all the time, you know, because they had to go by our house to go downtown. Everything was by foot then, you know, didn't have automobiles. They had them but they just couldn't afford them. Not in my section anyway.

JR: What did they do for work, your parents?

CB: Well my father, I guess you'd say he was a farmer because he, and my mother didn't work at that time, the woman's place was in the home, where it should have been, and that's because all her kids turned out to be the way they are, thank God, you know. There was seven in the family and there's been no problem with the seven children, you know. In fact, I lost my brother, younger brother there about last July, he passed away. So of the seven of us there's still six of us alive, and I'm the oldest. But, she always taught us the right thing, and that's important thing. We got things at home that you could never get in the schoolyard, you know, or from the teacher, you know. And this is why I'm not an advocate of this here child housekeeping or whatever the hell it is, you know, I mean -

JR: Oh, home schooling?

CB: Home schooling, no, no, I'm okay, that's all right. I don't blame that, I could understand that. Matter of fact I got a niece that, her two children are being home schooled. I'm not an advocate of these nurseries, you know what I mean?

JR: Oh, like daycare?

CB: Daycare centers, yeah. I'm not an advocate of that. You take, you've got twenty-five or thirty children, you know, and you cannot possibly devote eight hours a day to that one child, you know what I mean? You can love the kid, I mean, a pat on the head, nice little boy, you know, but you can't really show the love and affection that child wants. And those are the prominent years right there, and that's when you should, that's when all creatures want love. Believe it or not, all creatures, crazy these little animals scuddering around, you'll see them, you know, if you talk nice to them they'll stand there and look at you, you know. But if you shout, they'll take off, you know what I mean? But all creatures want love, and we're supposedly the higher element, you know, or the higher mental element of the animal kingdom, although I don't believe we are. Because, a animal of the lower species will never abandon their children, never abandon their children. They'll stay right with them until they feel they're old enough to take care of themselves. But with us, we'll take, after they get pregnant, they have a child, they throw them in a daycare center, or they'll take and get mother's aid and go out boozing.

I know, I worked for this one outfit where this, I was collecting on a monthly, on a weekly basis, and I could never find the place. So finally I found it. And she says, "Where have you been, I've been looking for you right along for the last couple, three months." I says, "Well, I couldn't find it." She says, "Well," I got, they call that mother's aid, it's actually Aid to Dependent Children, "I have mother's aid, my check will be coming on the 23rd, so stop in and," she says, "I'll make sure that I have some money for you." I says, "Okay". So I waited another day. And the next day, the 24th, I went over there. And she lived over there in French Island, wasn't the greatest house in the world, knocked on the door, it was around noon time. Kid comes, "Yes, can I help you?" I says, "Yes. Where's your mother?" There's three little children there and, of school age, I'd say about six, seven and eight or something like that, and they're eating bread and mustard. I says, "Didn't your mother get the check yet? How come you're eating bread and mustard?" He says, "Well that's all there is." I says, "Didn't your mother get the check yet?" "Oh yes, she got it a couple of days ago." I says, "She did." Well, now I'm becoming infuriated. I says, "Where

is she, anyway?" "She's down at the Long Branch, you know?" "Okay, thank you."

So I went down there. Well, she's sitting there, with the change for a twenty dollar bill and a couple of old female cronies hanging around, they're drinking beer, you know. And I just went spastic, you know. I says, "You son of a bitching old bag," I says, "you leave the friggin' kids up there eating bread and mustard, and the money that you spent in here, on these old friggin' bag friends of yours, should be going in their mouths instead," you know. So the bartender come over, and he says, "Hey fella," he says, "these are my customers, don't talk like that." I says, "Hey pal, I'm going to tell you something, I was brought up in a different manner, I have never struck a lady yet. I'd like to kick the shit out of her, but I have never struck a lady yet. Buy you, I could take my vehement out on you so you get your ass back there or I'll take it out on you." Well he took right off. She says, "Well I'm not going to pay you," you know. I says, "I don't give a shit whether you pay me or not."

I went right down to, I stopped work completely, come right down to Brewer when they had the welfare department here. And I asked the woman there, I says, "I have a problem here." And I told her what the name was, and where they lived and everything. "Well, I'm sorry Mr. Butera, but the only ones that can lodge a complaint with the welfare department is the immediate family themselves." I says, "The kids, the oldest kid's eight years old, how is he going to take a bicycle here," or hitchhike down here, you know. Oh boy. And that's what's wrong with our system. Our system's no better, really and truly.

And it's up to guys, I keep saying that, it's up to guys like yourself, young people to do something about it. Analyze the whole situation, read books and find out what transpired from way back in 1900 to today, and find out how the cycle is, and find out how it's got to go way back to where it was when it had, and find out that a woman's place, believe it or not, is in the home. It's not driving bulldozers and trucking around and stuff like that, you know. Her place is in the home. Because the children, that's the formative years, when they're, you know, when, before they go to school. They learn more believe it or not in the first four or five years at home from their parents than they do at school. And it's only logical to assume that if you've got, well in my day you had twenty-five or thirty kids in the class, and how could the teacher devote the proper amount of time to each individual. And even now, where they're having a lousy fifteen kids in the school they still can't devote. Yet they're still scrambling, they still want more for education. That to me, education is a farce to me, it's no longer the way it should be. And they're not learning anything, you know. Can you read?

JR: Oh.

(Laughter)

CB: I'm not being sarcastic, but, yeah I'm just saying...- Did you realize that there's only about, there's about ten or fifteen percent of college graduates with degrees that can't read or write?

JR: I didn't realize it was like that

CB: Well now you understand, don't misunderstand me, they can read and they can write, but they come to a word that's got over six letters and they don't know what the hell it is, you understand? And nor can they pronounce it, see, they can't even pronounce it. That's what I mean by not being able to read. They can read well, the-man-ran-down-the-street. They can read that, you know what I mean? But, if it says, the man ran down the avenue, av-e-noo, av-noo, av-noo, what is that, you know? So this is, it's screwy. And I continually try to express the fact that it's very important for people like yourself, especially where you I would say are politically inclined, make damn sure that the thing is righted. Because we can't, we can't survive as a society like this here, you know.

And the mother's place is still in the home, and she's the mainstay of the child itself. She's the one that forms the individual, the characters and all from that, you know. And there's a void, there's a void. It's just like a father leaving a mother, and the mother's of these, mothers that have no fathers, you know, on something like that there. The child needs a father, whether the child is a male or female, they need a father, you know. And a father image is not quite enough. It's okay, it's better than nothing, but then again there's a kind of a void in there that says, well, how come. Of course in my day, everyone had fathers. But if some kid didn't have, you'd say, "What happened to your father?" "Oh, he passed away." "Oh gee, that's too bad." You know what I mean. And he would feel a little bit out of place, you know, when all the kids are grouped around there and discussing this and that, he'd stand out in the rears because he'd feel he didn't belong because he didn't have a father. But now it's a different thing, now you're out if you have a father at home, you know? And that's not right, that's not right.

JR: Yeah, okay I'm going to quickly just turn the tape over here.

End of Side A, Tape One
Side B, Tape One

JR: This is side B with the interview with Charles T. Butera , and we were just talking about your childhood. And besides your parents, do you remember, like who else played a really big influence on you growing up would you say?

CB: Well, I don't know whether you would call it influence or not, but one thing that I have always remembered is that, of course on the street there were a lot of woodsmen, you know. They used to go out into the woods and work five or six months, they'd come back with four or five hundred dollars, you know, and then have a party, and then go back to the woods again. But there was this one fella, Jerry, I remember him distinctly. He was a friend of my father's and he'd come back from the woods, this was about two weeks before Christmas, you know. And he said, "Lorenzo, let's get the, Charlie, and take him downtown and get some kids Christmas presents for him," you know. So, okay, we're downtown, you know, and he says, "Pick out something you want Charlie." And I says, "Well, I don't know." He says, "Anything. Don't worry about the price, just pick it out." And there was, I was eyeing a chemical case, box, there, you know, beautiful, it had a scope and everything, this great big tin box, you know. And it was something like eleven dollars or something, you know. He says, "Would you like that?" I says, "Oh, that's

too expensive, Jerry.” He says, “No, give that, wrap it up for the boy,” you know. I never forget that, you know. And that same thing today would cost maybe a hundred and fifty dollars, you know. Because it was a tin box, you know, nice big case about like this here, you know, and it had all chemicals there where you could, it had a little booklet how you could make these different things, you know, with chemicals, you know. I never turned out to be a chemist, but at least I have a general idea of what it's all about.

JR: When did you graduate from high school?

CB: Nineteen forty-one.

JR: Forty-one, yeah, sixty years [ago], right. And during school you said you played football but did you, were there like any hobbies or interests or like school subjects that you really pursued?

CB: Well, my last year I told my father I was quitting working and I was going to go into extracurricular activities, and I become a member of the glee club and dramatic club and all kinds of different things. I wrapped them all up for one year. In fact, I was in three plays, and I had a good time that last year. Which is a good thing, you know, which is a good thing, because I had no memories except for busting my hump all the time.

JR: So what did you do after high school?

CB: Well after high school I went to work in the shipyards. Well, for that matter, I went to work, first I went to Shay Pritchard's as a plumber's helper for twelve dollars an hour more or less driving the truck around, driving men up to jobs. And then I got a job over to Rice's, it's Jordan's now, and I was getting eighteen dollars an hour there for making hotdogs. And then from there I went over to the shipyards, and from there went into the Navy, and I was in three years in the Navy.

JR: What years were you in the Navy?

CB: Let's see, was it, '43, '4, '5. December '45 I come out.

JR: Okay, so you were active during WWII?

CB: Oh yeah.

JR: Where did you serve, like places, all over?

CB: Yeah, all over is right, yeah, because I went to Memphis, Tennessee to a aviation ordinance school. Then I went to California, and then I come back to SC-1 school. I went to half a dozen different schools, I went to gunnery school, I was an aerial gunner. And then from there we, I don't know how it happened, but we went to Hawaii and I was with a squadron there, and then they transferred me to the Philippines and it was an amphibious group there, you know. I

don't know how I got involved with that, because there was no planes around. But I was still getting eighty percent plus, I was getting, all I had to do, they had a field close by there and all I had to do was go up six hours a month and I'd have my flying time. So I got fifty percent flight pay, and twenty percent overseas pay, and ten percent squadron pay, so I got eighty percent plus of my pay there for being involved as an aerial gunner. And I was there until the war got through with. When the war finished, then I come back home.

And got involved with the Hussons, and that's how I got involved with the party. And had two-bit jobs right all the way until I finally got an apartment house and that started it, finally I had something coming in. And then from there I bought another building, got a restaurant going, and bought some more. I had seventeen or eighteen apartments at one time. And I maintained them all myself, because I couldn't afford it. Like I figure this way here, you can't afford to play the richo, and have units and hire people to do the work for you, because they're going to take all of your profit. So, instead of paying a guy to do the wiring and the plumbing and the carpenter work, I did that myself, see. So that meant that there was nothing going out as far as expenses for labor, etcetera, and so forth. Whatever came in, all I had to do was pay the fuel and the taxes, and the payment on the buildings, and everything is mine, half of that. So that was, the result of that is wise management, I finally, thank God, with the help of the good Lord, you know, I made out pretty well.

But I still am disappointed that the fact is if I had started fourteen years earlier, my prime years when I was a young man in my early twenties, imagine what I would have amassed, if I had amassed that in my thirties, imagine what I would have amassed, you know what I mean? Because those are the prime years, you know what I mean? That's just like yourself, I mean you can do a hell of a lot more now if you start going into it, instead of waiting until you're sixty years old, and they're gonna say, well you're too old to, we can't use you. And you think you'll be on welfare. But then again, I wonder whether that's not the best road to go. You go from one place to the other and have your hand out, yeah, let's fill it. And here the poor bugger's busting his hump, you know.

There are a lot of things that are left unanswered. This here, I can speak the way I speak because I've come up from base poverty, and I mean base poverty. There were times that my poor mother was going crazy because what was going, she's going to make for, to eat this evening for supper, you know what I mean, and stuff like that. But, so I know what it is to be real hungry, you know? And I know what it is to have to work to accumulate a little bit so that you can buy something to eat with, instead of squander it, it's wasted, throw it away for something, you know. So instead of buying candy, you will save it and then buy a loaf of bread, you see what I mean, and stuff like that, or a quart of milk. So I know those things. And these things, I was maybe self taught some, but it's the conditions that forced that on me. It's amazing how many people don't learn this and don't understand that.

And then the ones, I think maybe they're smarter than I am, because they've got their hand out all the time, you know. I, years and years ago we had this Father Sabatino, and I had the restaurant, he used to come over in the afternoon after things slowed down and we'd have conversations. And I was bemoaning the fact, I was in my forties then, that I had a friend of mine, that he was

not the hardest working person in the world, but he was getting his check every month from the government for this, that, and the other thing, you know. For, not father's aid, I don't know what the hell it was. He couldn't work, he told me that, somebody told him if he went six months without working, then he could collect compensation from the government. Then he got a veteran's pension on top of that. He just really had it made.

So he [Father Sabatino] said to me, by the way, he says, "Are you happy?" And I says, "Well, yeah, sure, I guess so, Father." So he says, "What about your family, do you love each other?" I says, "Thank God, we're a good family, Father, there's no discrepancies there or anything." "You have enough to eat?" "Father, we got plenty to eat." He says, "Are you in debt, Charlie?" I says, "Well, I owe for the place here, Father, but other than that, I says, I don't ever buy anything I can't afford. I wait, make sure that I have accumulated X number of dollars first before I go into the venture." He says, "Well, that's good." Then he asked me other questions. Then all of a sudden he said to me, now, let me tell you where God comes in the picture. He has taken care of you, he's given you the mentality to properly take care of yourself. But I'll bet that poor friend of yours, he'll receive his check on the 23rd, and maybe by the 24th he'll be broke, you know. I says, well, you know, you enlighten me, Father, I never thought of it that way, you know, I never thought of it that way. He says, you have the ability to properly manage your affairs.

Would you believe it was two days later my buddy called me up? "Charlie?" "Yeah." He says, "Would you stop off and get me some gas, I run out of gas on Eastern Avenue." I said, "Yeah." He says, "Get me a couple of gallons of gasoline," he says, "and I'll pay you for it." I says, "Okay." So I went out and got a couple of gallons of gasoline, we put it in his car, and he says, "Follow me home and I'll give you the money, Charlie." I says, "Okay." At that time it was something like two bucks or something for the gasoline. It was more, it was five gallons, well anyways, it was about two bucks, you know. And so, as God is my judge, he comes back, this is three days after he received his check, he gives me two dollars, two one, two hundred one pennies. He had to rob the damn, the kitty, because he was broke. And I said, and then I reflected back to what the priest was telling me and I said, you know, now he's proven his point, now he is proving it.

And what a big difference it made then, you know, because I was despondent, because I worked for the sonofabitching Democratic Party and got no friggin' place at all, no help whatsoever, no matter how treacherous things were for me, you know, and how hard up they were. All I wanted to do was try to advance a little bit, and nobody would give me a sonofabitching inch, you know. That, and I still, every time I think of it I get so upset and irritated.

One year Muskie, I kept hounding him, so one year he says, "Go down to the State Hospital," I've got a, I've talked to Walt Ulmer over there, he's the, he was the superintendent of the hospital at that time, and he says, "you got a job there." I've graduated from college, you know, I'm an accountant by trade. So I go down there and I says, "Mr. Ulmer," I says, "I'm Mr. Butera," I said, "Edmund Muskie, Governor Muskie said, told me to come down and see you." And he says, "Oh yeah, I have heard of you, Charlie," he says. "You really want to go to work here?" And I says, "Well, what's the pay." He says, "Pay's forty-five dollars." I says, "Yeah, that's good." He says, "Yeah, but it's five and a half days, Charlie." And he says, "You know, I've

been following you,” he says, “in the papers. For all you've done for that friggin' Democratic Party, and that's,” and he was a Republican, “and that's all they could do for you is give you a job, now that you've graduated from college, give you a job that's, that I can't even get filled because it doesn't pay enough, you know.” He says, “It's yours if you want it. But if I were you I'd tell him to go stick it up his ass and the hell with it,” you know. I says, “You know, Walter, the way you explain it to me, I think you've got a, you've got something going there, you got something going there.” So I told him, “Thank you very much.” But there's a good example there, see? Something that nobody else would take, he finally says, well, here, take this, you know. I suppose he, and it worked out, he said, now that sonofabitch won't bother me any more. And I never did, never did. I figured if that's the kind of person he is, I never had respect for that. And after that, you know, I could not truthfully say that I respected the man, not after that.

And although, I had one, this friend of mine, Jim Mooney, he was an attorney, and we had a committee meeting, and that's when Bob was chairman of the city committee, and I was county chairman. So I said we ought to have a committee meeting of the city committee to, they wanted, at that time they had a city judge, municipal judge, that's what it was, they don't have municipal judges any more. So his name was presented, also the name of another individual that had given a couple of hundred dollars to the party. But Jim was on the committee, in fact he was treasurer of the committee, and he become vice chairman of the committee, too. But he worked hard with the Democratic Party, you know. So I asked the members there if they would vote, for a vote for who they wanted in there as the judge, and I had two or three names I presented to them. Well, it was a hundred percent Jim Mooney, you know.

So I went to Augusta, I made an appointment, went to Augusta, and I said to Ed, I says, you can't, “This fellow that you have in mind, forget about him.” He says, “Why is that?” I says, “Because the committee wants Jim Mooney in there,” you know. He says, “Well, I'm the governor.” I says, “I know that,” and I'm getting a little upset. And I says, “I know that, Ed,” I says, “but I'm telling you one thing, for your own personal good, you better okay him because if you don't,” I said, “one thing I do have, I have the power of the press,” I can go to the, and Jake Klab was a nice guy for that matter. So I says, “I'll tell them exactly why you refused him, because he was also from Hancock Street,” you know what I mean? Because he was a Hancock Street bum, and you're telling everybody how your father was a tailor and this and that and the other thing, but you won't, you ignore anyone that's in your class now that you've risen above them, you see? So he did, he gave the appointment. So he was in there for four or five years, Jim was, you know. Jim passed away about ten years ago.

But there's been a lot gone down the drains, really. And it's too bad that it, I don't know, maybe that's the way it is. If a person is, has a characteristic and he stands by it no matter what, he's going to stay down. But once some individual says the hell with it, I'll play ball and go along with the group, you know, then they get, somehow or other they prefer that type of individual. And that bowel movement, that son of a bitch, McVeigh there, look at the notoriety that sonofabee's got, a hundred and sixty-eight people he murdered, you know, plus children, you know. And I was looking in the paper, yesterday's paper was full, all about McVeigh, you know what I mean, all about McVeigh. Then there's two attorneys. Who's paying for these two attorneys that he's got there? We're paying for them. Maybe a couple of hundred bucks an hour.

You see what I mean? This is not right, this is not right. But that's the way the system is, and this is why it has to be changed, because if we continue the way we're continuing now, that it's going to be the end of this society as we know it. We'll be back to the Aborigine days, we'll be killing animals and having a big feast over a little bonfire with the whole crowd.

And as far as Aborigines, I think the best civilization evolved, between you and I, is the Indian civilization. Because they had a group of people that lived together, and there was one head and all the rest were equal. Nobody could say, well, I own a better house than yours, and I got a better teepee than yours, you know. And the chief's teepee was no better than theirs was. The only thing is, he was the oldest and the wisest so they listened, he became chief. The other one that had power in the tribe would be the medicine man. But other than that, all people were equal. Nobody else was better than the other. Nobody would say, hey, I'm better than you are, you know.

And this is one thing, our society doesn't do that. They've got so many, so many steps that you have to try to surmount to get up to the top. And then what do you get when you're up there? You make a billion dollars and two days later you're dead, so who cares? Five years later they'll say, that guy that had a billion dollars, what was his name? Triumph, I guess, Triumph, Trumpe, I don't know, you know, they won't know. As them who the vice president of the United States is and I'll tell right now a lot of people won't know. So that's how important it is. The only importance of amassing a few dollars is that it'll take, you can take care of yourself when the time comes. Because you can't, I knew this, I learned from, that did teach me something, the Democratic Party, that if I don't start doing something for myself I'm not ever going to get any help from anybody. Not from no government that I know of. Not the Democratic Party, if they're in force, will not help me. If they won't help me when they're in force, who the hell's going to help me. Why should the Republicans help me, if I'm a Democrat, you know? So, thank God the good Lord gave me the wisdom to put my assets in the proper channel so that I'm getting something back out of it, you know.

JR: Despite all, like the trouble that you have had with the Democratic Party, do you think that your efforts still did make a difference for like people, for, not necessarily Democrats in power but for the people who were voting, do you think what you did -?

CB: I really don't know. I really don't know. In fact, I would almost, there has to be some input there because a couple of months ago I went to Millinocket to a funeral, a wake, you know, of a friend of mine that had nothing to do with party affiliations. It just so happened that his sister was the grandmother of my grandchildren, you know, on the other side, in our backgrounds, you know. So anyway, I went over because of her, and I knew him, Bing, I knew him also. But I got talking to several of the fellows that I knew there and they got talking about the Democratic Party, how much, how atrocious things were that this damn Bush got in there and all that, you know. And I says, "Well that, Clinton wasn't that great a guy." "Yeah, but look what he's done for the country, look what he's done for the country," you see what I mean? And they were firmly entrenched. He says, "You remember, Charlie." And then they introduced me to some guy I hadn't seen, honest to God I hadn't seen him for forty some odd years, they said, "You know him, he used to be, he's still involved with the Democratic Party, he was chairman of

the city committee when you were running things,” you know. I says, “Oh yeah.”

But they all think the same now as they did then, you know, and they don't quite understand the fact that you got evil anywhere you go, the good and bad no matter where you go, you know. You can't say well, because I'm this, I'm good. Like, I could say, well I'm a Roman Catholic so you can't be better than that. Well, I'm wrong, you know, I'm wrong. Because a lot of these people that are Roman Catholics don't know what the inside of a Roman Catholic Church is, you know. Yet you got these people with different denominations, and they go to services every single Sunday, they're devoted, they're devout people. See so where's the difference? Can I say that I'm better than them because I'm Catholic? I go to Mass every Sunday, but if I didn't would I say that I'm better than them because I'm Catholic? I couldn't, you know. But that's the way the world is, that's the way the world is. And unless you belong to that club, then you have no right to cross that threshold, which is wrong, too. Because on either side you've got good people, on either side. It's just discouraging that I, I'll be honest with you, about fifteen years ago I said, you know, as far as society is concerned, we're on the top rung of the ladder so we've got no place to go but down. But somehow they keep putting extensions on there, we're going higher and higher, you know, and it's getting worse instead of better.

JR: We were talking about Bob Baldacci before. Could we talk a little more about him, just like how well you knew him, like what can you tell me about him, his career, whatnot?

CB: Well, Bob I've known him, actually it was way before the kids were born, so that gives you an idea how long I've known Robert. And the, we worked hard to organize. In fact, he was with me when we organized some of these towns here. And we'd have these, it's amazing, we'd have meetings in some of these small towns, you can't even remember the names of them, and we'd have fifty or sixty people at that meeting, you know. Where before that they were lucky to get one person in attendance there. Like I told you, in Bangor, we only had John Berry and a cat there, the only ones. I don't think if the cat was Democratic or not, but anyway. But at one time we were going, I don't know where, Medway I think we were going, and Bob stopped off at this store there and he got a great big chunk of cheese, you know. I'll never forget that. And it was about, we had a car full, there was about five or six of us in there, you know, and we're all eating cheese, I'll never forget that, on the way over.

And then another time we went to, oh, here's one thing here with Bob. Two Bob's here, this was Bob Baldacci and Bobby Campbell, God rest his soul, he just passed away. He was the chairman of the Brewer city committee. We went to the, that's another thing I don't understand, I don't understand. We went to a convention in Portland, state committee, state convention in Portland. And we got to Portland, we went with Bobby Campbell, his car, and we got there and they had the big party upstairs with Muskie and all the bigwigs, you know. And Hilton [*sic* Hubert] Humphrey was invited as a speaker, you know, so he came down with his aide and spoke, but he never spent any time with these people, he didn't invite them to their little parties, you see what I mean?

So after about the second day he came down and we went down to the lobby, Bobby, Bob, Bob, and I, you know, went down the lobby. And so he come over and he says, “Do any of you

fellows have a car or anything, a vehicle?" And I said, Bobby's, Campbell says, "Yeah I do." He says, "Senator." He says, "Well, I don't want to impose on you, but would you give me a ride to the airport?" The airport was about twelve miles away then from Portland, you know. He says, "I have to catch a plane there." And sure, he says, "Sure, I'll give you a ride." So we get in the car, and the three of us were in the front, and Hilton [*sic* Hubert] and his aide were in the back seat, and the guy's, "Well Senator, should we do this, we should do that." In the meantime, Bobby was asking him questions and he'd answer him, you know, and then the other Bob would ask a question, and he would answer it, and I'd ask a question, he would answer it. And the, his aide said, "Hey fellas, we got an awful lot of work to do so let's please leave the senator alone." And I'll never forget this, he [Humphrey] says, "Hey, these guys are good enough to take and drive me all the way up the airport, they had the common decency to do something that nobody else would do and you and you're giving them a hard time." He says, "You guys say whatever you want. You keep your mouth shut and we'll take care of the work when we get on the plane." See what I mean? Never heard another thing from that guy. And I respected him for that. But the thing that I was despondent about is the fact that he was going to run for president, he got that son of a bitching Muskie in there as vice president. And he didn't have the common decency to make sure that he had a way to get in or out of there, you know, he just dumped him. He made his speech and then it was, you're on your own now. He didn't invite him up to their affair that they had with them, or anything like that.

Of course, Muskie was Polish, and Pollacks are hard drinkers, they're hard drinkers. I know that from, but the only thing is they don't get drunk. Because I remember that on holidays I drove, and would visit with friends that were all of Polish descent, you know. And, this is the honest to God truth, they'd have bottles of whiskey, you know, and a table full of food, and we'd be there sometimes three days, eating and drinking, you know. But nobody got drunk, because you had to eat before you drank, you know.

One time I had a, I was working in Jersey and this friend of mine, he was living with friends of his that were Polish, so I would stay at the Y. So we were going out that night so I went over to his house, that was in Alwood, and I stopped off and Mrs., what was her name, anyway, she was a Polish girl, so she said to me, oh, Joe says, "Charlie, would you like a drink?" I says, "Yeah, I'll have a drink," you know. And she says, "No wait, did you have, did you eat yet?" I says, "No," I says, "Dan and I are going out to eat in a minute though." She says, "Well you're not going to have nothing to drink until you have something to eat. Sit down," she says, "and have something to eat." So she brought me, I says, "I'm going out to eat," you know. Miss Makowski I guess it was, "I'm going right out to eat." She says, "No, no, no, you sit down. You eat first." So I ate. Then she says, "Now you can drink all you want. Okay?" Then I had a drink. That's the way, and that's the way they are, that's why they never get drunk, you know. They can drink and drink and drink, but they make damn sure that the stomach is lined first with food so that it'll absorb the liquors, you know. I'll never forget that.

But the thing is that what bothered me, because I was in that environment, you know, is that he wouldn't have the common decency to invite, whether he drank or not, to invite him in there to at least, to converse, you know what I mean? Let him feel part of the situation. And not, like I say, I want you to come over here just to make a speech, after that take off, do what you want to. But

I'll have nothing to do with you, you know, I'll say "hi" when you come in, but you make your own way from there on in, I don't want nothing to do with you. Well that's not good, that's not good. When a person takes and goes all the way from Washington to come to Portland, Maine, you know, to speak in behalf of the Democratic Party, and the party in this area, and then you ignore him completely, in my book that's not good, that's improper principles.

But one thing I have had is principle, all of my life, that's what ruined me. Because there's a right way and a wrong way, and I felt, well, I have to do it the right way, regardless school keeps or not, I have to do it the right way. But these others that are, make it topside, they say no, we can step down a rung, you know, if it means this way or that way, if it means success or failure we'll go the route of success regardless what we do or who we hurt, you know, provided we don't hurt ourselves. And that's about the extent of it right there. It's too bad it's that way, but that's mankind for you. And it's not going to get different. It was the same way a thousand years ago, when you go back to Medieval century, you know, and all these big monarchs and counts and dukes, you know how treacherous they were. Yet, they were right on the top there, you know. And even today you pick up a book, you read about them, you won't read about a poor serf that busted his hump making him rich, you know what I mean? You'll never read anything about him. And nothing has changed, nothing has changed. Nothing will ever change, because as I said, the majority of the mankind are imbeciles. And I mean the majority. I'm not talking about just a small majority, I mean the great majority. It's too bad, but that's the way it is. Fortunately I hope that you're in that ten percent there. Because that's what we need, we need that, truly. But you have, you've got a good chance now to build up on your background, because you're doing things now that you could, you see both sides of the story, then you can analyze it, find out whether, which is the right side, you know. And then it depends on your characteristics.

If I were to go topside, then I'd better take and have a little attitude, you know. Unless things change. But things must change, things have to change. As I said, if they don't, it'll be the demise of our society as we know it.

JR: You're giving me really, a really very interesting different perspective on Muskie that we don't normally get. Are there other people who you think we could interview who would kind of share your perspective, like, who like kind of lived it and would be able to tell, you know, to give us more of a well rounded -? Like other people who were involved with you, like, say, in developing the Democratic Party?

CB: Well, it's difficult for me to give you an affirmative answer on that for the simple reason that I'm seventy-eight years old, and that means a lot of them has gone to make way for me, I guess. I hope it's topside. But, really, like I say, all these people, God rest his soul, Bob Baldacci's gone, Jim Moody is gone, Bobby Campbell is gone, all these people have all gone, you know. Especially these people that have the same philosophy that I had, you know, they're all gone.

JR: That's unfortunate, yeah.

CB: And I can't truly, when you get right down to it, I can't think of anyone, truly, I can't think

of anyone that would be in that time, that would have known him that well, that is. They've known him by name, but not that well, you know. They know about reading about him, but you can't get the exact individualities of a person by reading about him because it depends on the periodical, whether they're for or against them. If they're against him, he could be a saint and they'd blacklist him. But if they're for him, he could be the devil and then would appear as a sainthood, you know. So that's what I say, it's, you know, all those that I could refer you to, God rest their souls, they're gone. Paving the way for old Charlie boy.

[Laughter]

JR: You mentioned John Barry, can you tell me a little more about him?

CB: Oh yeah, John Barry, I met him way, way back. John's been gone for about twenty-five, thirty years now, I'd say. He was a chairman of the, not chairman, he was a city councilman, the city of Bangor, and also a member of the Democratic Party. And in fact, let's see, where was it, I think it was in Lewiston, he was a speaker at Lewiston for the Democratic Party. He was a, he had, John was a good boy, a smart boy, too. He worked for P.J. Burns, he married one of the Burns girls, you know. And, but prior to that he was a radio announcer, you know, and had a good voice, and a good looking man, you know; had a terrific personality, really and truly. He's the one of these individuals that, you know, you can't tell his background by the way he carries himself around, you know. Instead of saying, well, you know, some of these individuals, they haven't got a pot to piss in yet they're so pompous, you know, you can't, you're dealing with a ten foot pole, you know. But John was altogether different, you know, John was a down-to-earth individual. I liked John very much, you know. And he was, that was way back in the very beginning. Because I said, there wasn't any Democrats at all, and it's just fortunate that at that caucus, John Barry attended that caucus, you know. And if it hadn't been for that, God knows what would have happened.

JR: How about Madeleine and Dick Kiah?

CB: Kiah, yeah, Madeleine Kiah went with me to, that's another thing there, Madeleine was a hard worker. And she used to be on the phone continually. She was one of those instrumental with helping me organize the county, you know. And she used to build up phone bills something fierce, two or three hundred dollars a month, you know. God almighty. And, but latter part of it, poor Madeleine, she lost it. It's too bad, truly. I mean, I'm not being facetious, but I'm being honest. Because we had one member, in fact he, Jimmy Pouler who runs a dye house in Brewer, he was running for the city council. So he wanted to know if I would go with him to make the rounds to meet the people. And I says, "Sure Jim." So we went over to Madeleine's house, you know, and she says, well, I'm not going to vote for you. I'll let you in, Jim, but I'm not going to vote for you. I don't care what you say, I'm not going to vote for you. And I says, well just don't be too harsh, Madeleine, listen to the man, see what he's got to say, you know. She says, I got nothing against you, Charlie, but I don't want that son of a bitch near me, you know. So anyway, before that, I think it was before that, when Dick Kiah, Dick was only in his fifties when he passed away, you know, and they had the wake at the house. And in fact, Betty Grabel and her husband were there, not Betty Grabel, but Betty, what the hell's her name, movie actress there,

she was one of the greats.

JR: Not Bette Davis? Really- ok, wow, ok.

CB: Bette Davis, yeah, she was there, and her husband there, was there, and she was a very individual. Maybe, she was nice to talk to, she wasn't the uppity-up type that screwed herself in a corner, says, well, you peons don't come near me, you know. But she was there, and -

JR: How did she know the Kiahs?

CB: I don't know, to be honest to God truthful with you, I really don't know. But she was there. No, wait a minute, now wait a minute, I'm sorry, I'll take that back. That wasn't at the wake, it was at another affair we had, another affair. But at that wake especially, John Gromley, God rest his soul, he's just passed away, him and Dick Kiah were good buddies, they grew up together, you know, and they played together and everything. So, I don't know what the hell, we had a committee meeting in Brewer, and Dick was the chairman of the city committee at that time, and he introduced John Gromley. He says, "This is an old friend of mine, he just retired, he retired as a colonel from the Army, you know." And he says, "I'm trying to get John interested in politics, so I'd like to nominate him to be chairman in my place because I've really had enough of politics for now." He'd been in there for about ten or twelve years, you know. So we all put in John Gromley. Well, John was a hell of a nice fellow, you know, truly a nice fellow. So when Dick was laid up there, John comes knocking on the door, and Madeleine opens the door, she says, "What the hell are you doing here?" "Well, I come over to see Dick." She says, "You get out of here, I don't want you in my house." You know, I says, "Madeleine, you don't do things like that. My God, the guy had the common decency to come up here to visit a friend of his, not your husband but a friend of his that he grew up with, you can't do that." She says, "I don't give a damn, he's the one that killed my husband." I says, "What do you mean, he killed your husband?" "Well, when he took the chairmanship away from him." I says, "You weren't there," I says, "Dick was the one that told, asked him to be chairman, and asked the members there if they would vote for him," you know. They didn't have to, but he just asked them at their request, personal request. So, this sort of thing.

And then, we were still friendly years and years after that until they had a swimming pool put in in Brewer, and it was a swimming pool, great big pool with, opening during the day, and you could close it in the winter time, and you could have swimming over there, but the thing was it... And anybody from Penobscot County could go there swimming, only five dollars to go swimming, you know. But what about the locals? A local kid would pay five dollars, too, you know. So the *Bangor Daily News* wrote a big article for this swimming pool, they thought it was a great thing for them to have. So I went down to the editor, it was a different, it wasn't (*name*) any more, it was a different editor, and I asked him if, I'd like to put this article here, about the pool, you know. He says, "Well I'm sorry," he says, "we're not taking any more written on this pool." I says, "Well, I'm sorry but you're going to have to." I says, "I have a, based on the federal law," I says, "Where you're an organization and I'm an organization-," "What organization?" I says, "I'm on the, I'm the president of the group opposed to the swimming pool," you know, "so you have to print it." "Well, okay." I say, "And I want you to print it

word for word and don't you leave out a syllable or anything, punctuation, nothing," I says, "because I'll scan that and that son of a bitch better be ready and it better be right." Well, it was.

Well, you'd be surprised at the calls I got after that. Because I told him, if you people are so great for it, have it in Bangor at Bass Park, you know what I mean? And we'll pay the five bucks to go over there. What everybody seems to forget, that we'll raise a certain amount of dollars for this, the government will give a certain amount of dollars, but then the maintenance will be on our backs until eternity, all eternity, you know. And that's going to be heavy. So, you'd be surprised the phone calls I got. "You know, I never looked at it that way, Charlie, I never looked at it that way there." And he says, you were right. Well, it was defeated.

Well, she got so pissed off about that, she got so pissed off, you know. And never spoke to me again. I'd say, "Hi, Madeleine." Don't talk to me, you know. And I says, "My God, I don't understand it." I says, "Madeleine, what's the matter with you?" you know. She says, "You know what's the matter with you, that damn pool had nothing to do with you. If you're against that pool there, I don't want nothing to do with you." I says, "Well, we're all entitled to opinion, Madeleine, we're all entitled." "I know that but you should never been against that." I says, "Well, I'm looking out for Charlie Butera. I know if that pool goes in there, it's going to cost me two or three hundred dollars a year more for taxes, you know, along with everybody else in Brewer."

That's why I got out of Brewer, because the taxes are atrocious there. I had an apartment house that I bought there back in the fifties, and I was, I think the first tax on that was a hundred and twenty eight dollars or something on three acres of land. Then, when I moved over here, I sold it to my daughter. She asked, there was no sewer and water then, but she pays forty-two hundred dollars a year now for taxes, because I built the house since then, but she pays forty-two hundred dollars a year, plus sewer and taxes that run another couple thousand.

Mrs. Butera: How you guys making out?

JR: Just fine.

Mrs. Butera: You been here for about two hours, almost an hour and a half.

CB: Time flies.

Mrs. Butera: Yeah, when you're gabbing, I agree. Yeah, we have company and they're gone.

CB: Oh, was it (*name*)?

Mrs. Butera: No, Ben and Norma.

CB: Oh, is that right?

Mrs. Butera: Yeah, he came to see the building. He said, why'd they quit?

CB: They did?

Mrs. Butera: A long time ago, when they got through putting the building together. That thing going?

JR: Yes.

(Pause in taping.)

JR: Okay, I think we were, yeah, we were talking about the Kiahs, if you have anything more to add, or anything

CB: But that's, I still, I don't understand why, because we were always very good friends, always very good friends, and even though she was down and out on a lot of people, she always stood by me, you know. And then this last thing happened, it I guess broke the camel's back probably. Poor Madeleine died about a couple years after that, you know. But I knew the whole family, I knew Dick and Mary Ellen, and his son there, he's in Massachusetts, no, New Hampshire, he's got two bars in New Hampshire. He graduated from college and then he went into, this friend of his there, that went to college, too, they started a little bar while they were going to school. Worked out good and they built another one, now they're doing good.

JR: You also mentioned, I think you mentioned Joe Binnette?

CB: Yeah, Joe Binnette was in the legislature. He was, this is one of the, I met him way, way back when I met Alex Latno and Paul Dufour, they were the echelon of the city committee in Old Town. And at that time Old Town was the Democratic city in this area. I think Millinocket and Old Town were Democrat, they had Democratic leaders, they always had Democratic legislators. That's the only two. Alex Latno was from Old Town, and I remember, no, what was it, I can't remember, Walls, I think, was from Millinocket. But they were the only two legis-, the only two legislators, he was a legislator, the only two legislators. We had nobody in the county on the committee, nobody whatsoever, no senators, no nothing, you know. In fact, they used to vote for three senators at large, you know. Now they vote I think it's four from sections, different sections. And the city of Bangor, they used to vote four at large in the city of Bangor. Now they vote five in districts, a district for every one of them. So things have changed a little bit.

And then they had the big box. In fact, I was, I ran numerous times, that's another thing, I ran so many times for public office, and just barely made it but never did make it. But I was, I ran for sheriff one year, did I, I ran for sheriff, yeah, I think so. Then I ran for the county commission and I just missed that. But I went to Montana to work as an accountant for *(name)* Electric, and when I come back they were looking for somebody to run for sheriff for the county, Penobscot County. I says, "No, I don't want nothing to do with the Democratic Party any longer," you know, I've had it. So this Matt Dwyer, he ran for sheriff, and he got elected. And the reason why, because they voted the big box, that was the last year they had the big box. So if you voted

for the president, everything followed suit there, you know. And after that they had, you voted for the individual. But I ran for the legislator a couple of times, I think it was. I ran for sheriff, I ran for county commissioner, I run numerous times for city councilman, in Bangor once or twice and in Brewer four or five times. Always close, but never quite made it.

And the reason is, being honest, I know that making my rounds one time in Brewer, I knew a Mrs. Footman. And she says to me, "How do you feel about this milk situation?" I says, "Well, I'm against the subsidies," I says, "I don't think that's right," I says, "they should let it go." And of course you know who was making the money then, the dairies were making the money, not the poor little farmer, you know. And I says, "What's happening the way it is right now, you're guaranteed X number of dollars, so much a quart, for milk at that time was about twenty-five or thirty cents a quart, but the poor farmers are still only getting about eight cents a quart," you know. So who's making the money for it? This wholesale, retailers are only getting about a penny a quart, so you people must be making the money, you know. She says, "Well, you know who I am?" I says, "I know who you are." She says, "Well you should never have said that, you should have told me that you -." I says, I says, "I'll be a hypocrite if I told you that." I says, "Why should I tell you that I'm all for these subsidies, when I'm not?" you know. Because if you let it float the way it is, then it'll find its way and the prices will go down, you'll have competition, see? Because Cumberland Farms was trying to come in there, they wouldn't allow Cumberland Farms in, see. But I says, "When you prove to me that the farmer is getting his just share, then I'll back it." But when it's this way here so that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, and the poor little bugger that's out there raising cattle, milking cattle twice a day, I says, he's the one that puts in the work. The others put in their, dump a truck load of milk into a container, press a button, and watch the quarts come out, you know.

So, but I was being honest and that's, I still, if I had to do it over again, I still would remain honest. I can't, I was brought up to be an honest person, I can't very well change my attitude on that. But it's the, it's, I know I've taught my kids to be honest, I'm on my grandchildren's butt to be honest, and thank God I've got good grandchildren, but I'm wondering whether I'm making a mistake or not, you know. In not telling them, well get it while you can and get all you can, you know, the hell with wherever the chips fall, you know, as long as they fall your way.

JR: How about Ben Dorsky? I know he was a Republican, but did you ever have any run ins with him?

CB: Ben Dorsky? No, I really, I don't even know the man, I don't even know the man.

JR: Okay, he was the head of the Maine AFL-CIO.

CB: Yeah, the AFL-CIO, that's it.

JR: For quite a long time.

CB: I know the name, but I don't know the individual.

CB: No, okay. All right, I guess from here just, how about any other, like you mentioned Margaret Chase Smith, any other Maine political figures you had run ins with? I know you -

CB: Well, all of them. Like Jim Oliver, and Hathaway, and Coffin, and -

JR: What do you think of Frank Coffin?

CB: I can't say anything detrimental to Frank, but the only thing is that these little incidents kind of leave a little stigma. One time I had to go see him for something, and he was living in Lewiston then. And I, he saw me drive in, he had a big yard, and he saw me drive in. So he come out on the porch there, you know. "Hi Charlie." I says, "Hi Frank." So, I says, "I got a few things here I want to discuss with you," I come over. "Yup," he says, "I'll be right down." It was a porch there, a deck, you know. And I gave him the material and we bullshitted for about fifteen, twenty minutes, but he didn't have the common decency to say, "Well come on in." That's one thing I will never do, allow, a salesman will come over, "Hi, I'm so-and-so." I says, "Come on in." "No, no, I just want to have a few minutes with you." "Come inside and talk," you know. And there's nobody so low that I have to kick them out of my friggin' house, you know. You have just as much right in this house as anybody else, you know. And we've always been brought up that way.

And because of that, that's only twice in my lifetime, believe it or not, that I have been refused admittance into a home, and that's with Frank Coffin and Ed Muskie, see. And each time, with Muskie especially, it was as a favor to him, it was a favor to him. Ten thousand names, he sorely needed. He says, oh, I'm so happy you got them, Charlie, because if we didn't get these here I wouldn't have enough names. Deadline was the next day, you see what I mean? Because I can't remember on what the amount of the names, he had something like three or four hundred thousand he had to have, you know. But ten thousand doesn't sound much when you're talking three or four hundred thousand, but when you're talking needing a couple of thousand, ten thousand's a hell of a lot of votes, a lot of petitions.

JR: Let me switch tapes.

End of Side B, Tape One

Side A, Tape Two

JR: And now we're on Tape Two, Side A, with the interview with Charles Butera, and you were just talking about Frank Coffin, I wonder if you have any more to add?

CB: No, other than that, I mean I, personally I thought he was a nice fellow, I liked Frank, you know. Because we never had any run-ins or discourses or anything like that. I guess the, uh, etiquette was about the only thing that was involved there, you know what I mean. And I don't think, just between you and I, I don't think he really understood all about it, you know. Because it, a lot has to do with how your background is, how you were brought up, you know. And in all probabilities, it's hard to adjust truly. If you're on the top of the ladder, it's pretty difficult to come down and descending down the bottom, you know. It's okay to accept somebody that's

climbed up that ladder and put him on the same level as you, but for you to have to go down to his level is not that easy. And that's what I feel a situation like that is with him.

But on the other guy [Muskie], he was from that level, and he went up, and he stayed up, and he said the hell with everybody below me, you know. This is why I, thank God, I never had any respect at all, I had no respect. Not after the second term, had no respect. And then again, I've got to say he did absolutely nothing to try to help me, he was always giving me excuses. I got the proof, that's why I dug all this out, I got proof. I'm not just saying these things, I'm telling you. Like I said, there's a number of letters I got from different places, from President Kennedy, Adlai Stevenson, and Muskie, and Clauson, the whole batch are right here, you know what I mean? But the ones that were looking for help was Ed Muskie. And Frank Coffin was, he was a state chairman, so that had nothing to do with the position, that had to do with the political situation that happened, it was just a question where the next thing was going to be, etcetera and so forth. He was chairman of the state committee then, you know, and I was state committeeman from Penobscot County.

Then, well I told you about the judgeship there, and it's little things like that where they forget that you have to look after, you know, it's just like you're a, I'll tell you, here's a good example. It's got nothing to do with politics, but we had this Indian that lived in Lyman and he was a fisherman, and he was, I worked at J.R. Cianchette as a office manager of the housing over here, where they had the housing way, way back, when they first built that housing for the base there. Well, Mel (*name*) his name was, and he had five or six guys on his crew, well no, he had about a dozen guys in his crew, and he had a station wagon. And they were all fishermen. So they worked with him that summer, and they come to Bangor and they lived over Lyman there. And he had a station wagon and the first thing he'd do, he'd come in, and Getchell Brothers had a stand out there on Brewer where you put a quarter in and you get a bag of ice, you know. First thing he'd do is get a bag of ice and put it in there with the water so them guys had cold, cool water all day long, you know. And what a stinking old cab he had, he had a station wagon, they had all kinds of this dried, this codfish there, you know. They were always (*unintelligible phrase*) all day long. Well, he was a hell of a nice fellow, he was an Indian, and he was a hell of a nice fellow, and he was the foreman.

So one day I was walking around the site there and I stopped by there, and I can't remember who the guy was, big fellow, so I says to him, he was shoveling and, so I asked him, "What are you doing?" I says, "Put the damn shovel down," I says, "and finish your cigarette." "No, I can't do that." I says, "Why not?" I says, "Mel's not here." He says, "I know, Mel went up to the main office," he says, "but I don't want to make him look bad." And they're all working just as hard as could be. So I says, "I'm sure Mel won't mind." He says, "I know he won't," he says, "but," he says, "if a superintendent comes by and sees us hanging around while he's at the office, it won't look good for him." I says, "Well here, have your cigarette, give me that damn son of a bitching shovel and I'll do the shoveling for you," see, "go hide behind the car there and they'll count heads instead of counting people," you know. So I shoveled there for about ten or fifteen minutes. Well the next day, he comes in, he comes over to the office, he says, "Charlie." I says, "Yeah." "You got a minute?" I says, "Yeah, what's the matter?" He says, "I got you something." He bought me a lobster. I says, "What's this for?" He says, "For helping me out."

“Ah,” I says, “you shouldn't have done that.”

We had another guy that had about forty guys in his crew, a foreman, and he was a miserable old son of a bitch, and I mean he was miserable. And they were digging a big ditch, and I was over there one day and I looked down the ditch and all the guys were sitting there and bullshitting and smoking a cigarette. I says, “Where's so-and-so?” I can't remember the guy's name, that's how insignificant he was to me. So, “Oh, he's gone up to the main office.” And they had one guy, oh, I think he's coming, here comes a yellow truck now, no, no, that's not him, you know, and they're all ready to grab a shovel, you know. So I'm bullshitting with these guys about fifteen or twenty minutes, you know, then all of a sudden, “Yeah, he's coming now,” you know. And they stood right there and they waited, yeah, right, okay, his truck's there and he's coming up, and they grabbed a shovel and shoveled like crazy, you know. And for about an hour, an hour and a half while he was up the office, not a thing was being done. But Mel (*name*), he had seven or eight guys working for him, they kept busting it all darn day long, more than they should have, you know. Because he was a hell of a good guy, hell of a nice guy. He treated them as equal. He got codfish for them, and got ice water for them, you know, he never gave them a hard time, and they were a happy crew, they were a happy crew. So this is the way you got to be, see. Now, he puts himself down to their level and he becomes one of them, instead of saying, “I'm better than you.” And you can't do that. That taught me a lesson there, too, you know. These little things like that you pick up in the run of a lifetime, you find out that it is good to be good, you know.

But somehow or other, in politics, that's not the case. Although I must admit that, God bless him, John is a good boy, Johnny is a good boy. He's very conscientious, he's very affable, he's friendly with everybody, you know. And he's not the kind, he'll put himself down to your level, he's not the type that says, “I'm a congressman, you have to look up to me, you know what I mean.” He comes right down to your level, you know, (*unintelligible phrase*).

JR: Yeah, yes, actually I've had a few run ins with him.

CB: Yeah, yeah, I like, I've always liked John anyway, I've always liked John.

JR: What do you think about him running for governor?

CB: I think he'll make it, I think he'll make it.

JR: Yeah, I like him, too.

CB: In fact, one thing, if he makes governor, I'm going to request an appointment. I mean this. And I'll tell you why. Years and years ago when Bob and I were busting our hump for the Democratic Party, they had all these different positions, you know. And one of the most insignificant ones was commissioner of Penobscot Boom, at one time they had a commissioner of Penobscot Boom. Well, they still have it on the books, but it was insignificant, I don't even know if they had anyone fill the position, you know. But if they did, it will be just in name because there's nothing to do there, you know. So Bob and I would always fool around, grab ass

and say, well, we're going to have to ask Muskie to get us a commissioner of Penobscot Boom, you know, make us commissioners of the Penobscot Boom. So that's what I'm going to ask him. I don't even know if it's still in effect today, but going to ask him, I'd appreciate a commission on the Penobscot Boom.

And he thought the world of his father, too, John always thought the world of his father. In fact, he's got a ring that his father had, you know, that he wears all the time. Yeah, John's a good boy. I remember when he was kid, he was twelve years old, you know, and I was down to the produce house getting some material and I see John there, and I says, "Hi John, how are you doing, how's your folks?" "Fine, thank you, Charlie." And he says, "I come over to pick up a bag of onions," you know. And I says, "How are you doing, what are you doing anyway." He says, "Well," he says, "I'm head cook down here," he says, "I make all the pasta, I make all the spaghetti." I says, "You do John?" He says, "Yeah." He was so proud. "Well that's terrific, that's great." That's when they were down on Howard, not Howard Street, down where Union Street there, you know, when he had his place there. Good old John. But John's never changed, John's always been a likeable fellow. At least he has been with me. I don't know. And I'm sure he has been with others, too, but with me he's always been something else, you know, truly. I've always thought the world of John.

And I guess his father had a good influence on him. His father didn't call him John, his father called Jahn, J-A-H-N. Jahn, hey Jahn. Yeah, I saw Bob the last time just before he passed away. And it was a fast thing, too. He had cancer of the pancreas I guess it was, something like that. And Bobby, his son Bob told me, he says, "You know dad's pretty sick," he says. And he says, "I know he'd appreciate it if you'd go visit him." I says, "Gee, I didn't know anything about that," I says. "Yeah." "Well, how long has this been?" He says, "Well, about a month ago there, he was up on a ladder doing some work there, and then all of a sudden he says, 'Oh, my God.' He come down and he damn near collapsed, so we rushed him to the hospital and," he says, "I don't know whether he'll remember you or not because he's out of it," you know. So that afternoon, of course Rose [Butera] is a good friend of Mary [Baldacci], and Rose and I went over to see him. And, he really, "Charlie, how are you, Charlie?" you know. And we couldn't converse really great, you know what I mean, but we, of course Paul was there, and let's see, who was it, Paul, yeah, I guess Paul was there. And I can't remember, Jerry, I think Jerry was there, too. But anyway, there were a couple of the boys there, you know. So, it made it comfortable, they appreciated the fact that . . .

But I mean I appreciated it more than they did because I was a good friend of Robert's, you know. And after I got in business and everything, well I, I never did devote the proper time to him, you know. Because there's no reason why I couldn't have gone over there. Like he'd tell me all the time, "Come up and have coffee, Charlie," you know, over to his restaurant, "come on over here," you know. I went over there a couple or three times and, you know, he was so happy to see me, you know. And it was just, it just felt good being around Bob, I always liked Robert, you know, he was very, very good to me, and with me, you know. I mean he's, there's one guy that I could never, ever, ever have anything detrimental to say against, you know. And as far as the children are concerned, I, it's impossible for me to try to figure or find something against them, because they're all good boys. At least they are with me, anyways. And that's how I judge

an individual, is how are they with me, you know what I mean? You know, I go over, if I have lunch over there, to the restaurant there, Paul comes over, and Jerry comes over, you know, Harry comes over. So, yeah, but you feel good, you know, you feel good.

But the older you get, you lose some of that. Little by little, you know, you pick up the paper, this one's gone, and then. That's why I say, I can't help you with anyone that can speak the way I speak on this subject because they're gone. Madeleine Kiah's gone, Dick Kiah's gone, John Gomley's gone, you know, Bobby Campbell's gone, Bob Baldacci's gone, Jim Mooney is gone, I could go on and on and on, you know. Thank God I'm still here.

JR: All right. How about, just one more to ask you about, Bill Cohen. Like, do you remember, you probably remember him from way back?

CB: Oh yeah, I remember him as a child.

JR: Yeah?

CB: Yeah.

JR: What did you think of him?

CB: Well, I guess Bobby's a good boy. I mean Bill, he's got a brother by the name of Bobby. Because I know his father, I knew his grandfather. His grandfather was a baker there, that Jewish bakery. And then his father worked with him, and his brother, his uncle Bill worked with him, too. And then his aunt Getel, she worked for him, too, you know, the three of them worked in there with the old man, and then when he passed away they took over the business. And it was, it's a funny situation (*unintelligible word*), they, Getel, anything that they sold at the bakery was hers, you know. Anything that the other boys sold, because they had their own routes, you know, Ruby had his own route and everything. So I knew him way back then when he was just a little kid. They lived right next door to me, Billy lived right next door to me I think on the second floor of the Solaby's house, you know. And, until he was about ten, eleven years old. And then they moved up to Somerset Street which is on the other end of Hancock Street, but it's off Han-, it's Somerset Street instead of Hancock Street, you know. But Billy was a good boy, he was a good kid. You know, I remember him like children, you know, he was a child as far as I was concerned, but he was a good little boy, you know, he wasn't a wise guy or anything like that. He was a great basketball player. He played basketball for Bangor High School and for Bowdoin College, and he was a great basketball player.

But, like I say, I know him, he was Republican. That's another thing, every time I go down to the bakery I try to get Dick and Ruby and Getel, why don't you sign up on the, they were Democrats, truly they were Democrats, you know. Because even then, on the average, you were Democrats there, you know. And, ah, what the hell (*unintelligible phrase*), what the hell's one vote. I says, "Ruby, one vote is, makes all the difference in the world. Elections have been won and lost because of one vote." Ah, the hell with it. So finally, you know, when the boy, because he ran for city council, he got elected to that, in fact he was on the school board prior to that, but

when he ran for congressman, then they enrolled and they become voters. I don't know whether they enrolled as Democrats or Republicans, but they enrolled, you know, and they voted. Because I saw Getel, in fact the, God rest her soul, just before she passed away I saw Getel and she says, "What do you think about Billy running against Hathaway?" Hathaway was senator then. I says, "Well, I don't think he's going to," I says, I wished him well, I said, "but the only thing is that Hathaway's a good man," and I says, "I'm sure that Billy's a good man, too, but he should stay in there as congressman and let Hathaway alone." I says, "He's going to have a hard time beating Hathaway," you know. And she says, "Well I think..." Well he did, he beat him, you know.

And then another thing that is hard, you talk about diehards, I'm what you might call a diehard Democrat in a way, as far as my principles and philosophies are concerned. But not to the extent that I'll vote for anybody as long as he's a Democrat, you know, you know what I mean? He's got to be a decent individual first. But when Billy Cohen ran for congressman, I voted naturally for Billy, you know. And so these friends of mine that lived on the street there, I says, they were Democrats, said, "Well oh no, we're Democrats, we can't vote for Billy." I says, "He's a neighbor for God's sakes," I says, "he grew up next door to you, and you can't vote for him?" I says, "He's a good boy." If he was a scoundrel, I'd say well I don't blame you. But Billy is a good boy, you know. And, "Oh no, I vote Democratic." I says, "Well, that's funny but," I says, "I've always worked hard for the Democratic Party but I couldn't see myself voting against Billy Cohen."

It's like Baldacci, let's supposing John, let's supposing that we were Republicans instead, and yet he changed over to be a Democrat and now he's a Democrat, you know what I mean, or Republican I meant, he's a Republican now, and do you think for one minute that I'd say, well, I can't vote for Baldacci, no way, because I got to vote for the Democrat whoever he is, you know. No way, I got to vote, I have to, and within my conscience, good conscience to myself, and to be honest with you in good conscience to his father. Imagine what his father would think if I would vote against his son, which is a good boy. But if his son was no good I could say, well, that's, and I'd give him my reasons and then his father, I'm sure, understands that. But he's a good boy, and there's no reason whatsoever that I should ever take the attitude, well, I'll vote for my own party instead of for the incumbent, or whatever it is there. But, he happens to be belonging to my same party, but that's not the reason I'm going to vote for him. I'm voting for him because he's John Baldacci, you know.

And that's the way I have been, my philosophy has been that way all through its inset, and this is what has hurt me and I'll be honest to God truthful with you, I realize that now that I'm older and wiser, it has hurt me terribly. And I got absolutely nothing and nowhere with the political system, yet I busted my hump for them ever since its inception, way back when I was just a kid, you know. In my juvenile years, the years that I should have spent working for myself, I worked for the Democratic Party. And what did I get out of it? Absolutely nothing. And this is something, it's still a bitter pill, it's hard to swallow.

JR: Well, I think I'm pretty much, have all the questions I have answered. Do you have anything more you'd like to add, anything you'd particularly like to share about yourself, the

Democratic Party, whatever?

CB: Well, as far as myself and the Democratic Party, we go back a lot of years and, from its inception. And it was very discouraging at the very beginning when there was nobody there but myself and a couple others. And I recruited, in the beginning they were all close friends of mine that I recruited to get on the committee, you know. And finally, it worked in, you know what I mean. It's hard, it's hard, you know. Even with Bob Baldacci, I mean, I had no problem getting him involved in that. But still, it's kind of hard to say, well, come fight for a dead horse. You know what I mean? You want to be on the winning side. Everybody wants to be on the winning side, and this is why I hate it when these stupid people, they'll say, "Well vote for so-and-so." "Why?" "Because he's going to make it." I could care less whether he makes it or not. What is he going to do for the good of the people, this is what I'm concerned about, you know.

I like to put myself in the shoes of another person and find out just exactly how they feel under these circumstances, under these conditions, and act according to that, you know, instead of saying, well, who cares. As long as I'm content with what I'm doing, that's what matters. That's not what matters. Not if you want to procreate conditions in this society, you know. But there's a lot of things like that that kind of bother you, you know, that have bothered me, that have bothered me. And it's just, but it's something, it's an experience, it's something that I've had a good experience on, especially just, I can credit myself with making a Democratic state out of a Republican state, because it was really hard then, believe me, it was a dirty word to be a Democrat. You had to be courageous to say, "I'm a Democrat," you know. I might be, say, "What are you Charlie?" "I'm a Democrat," you know. And you might say, "Well he's just a jackass, he don't know what he is." But that's true, the way it was, you know. It was a dirty word. But today, now, it's a good word to be a Democrat, because especially in the state of Maine, because we more or less got out of a, climbed out of our bootstraps and got topside a little bit, you know. I just hope that they continue getting the right people in there to do the right thing for the people.

And I know as far as John is concerned, it's definitely going to be the right thing with John, truly it is. John is going to do right, because he's never forgotten his past. And I knew his grandparents, I knew his grandmother on his father's side, I knew his grandmother and grandfather on his mother's side. They grew up in my neighborhood, you know. I knew Mary ever since she was a little girl, you know. So, we're all the same people, you know. And John, God bless him, he hasn't changed at all, you know, he hasn't, in all the years that he's been in Congress, you know, he's no different now than he was when he was on the city council, you know. He's that kind of a person, you know. He doesn't look upon himself as being way better than you are. He's just an everyday person. That's why he's so liked.

And everybody, I don't think I've, I haven't heard anybody that can have a, say a bad word about John because, and he's got a good memory, he's got a good memory. Because I have a sister-in-law that works over at the school lunch in Lewiston, you know, that's part of his territory. And he was talking to her and, I don't know how my name come up, oh, she says, that's my brother-in-law, you know, it's my wife's, she married my wife's brother. And she told me, I saw that John Baldacci, oh, he's so nice, you know. And then, that's one of the reasons, that's how he is,

you see. Not just like, not with acquaintances or something like that, with everybody, you know. Regardless of what your stature is, you know, he's that way. Thank God. He's like his father, his father had a terrific personality, his father was something else. Yeah, poor Bobby. I wish to God he was still alive to see this. But that's the way fate is. But then, like John and I say, you know, he knows what's going on, he can see it. You better mind your q's, John, and play it safe because your father's up there.

JR: Yeah, he's watching you.

CB: He's watching you. But all the pride that poor John, that poor Bob would have to see his son in there. God. I always thought the world of poor Bobby, God rest his soul.

JR: When did he pass away?

CB: Let's see, he was sixty-four, and he would have been seventy-two, so about six, six, seven years, eight years ago I'd say, about eight years ago. Time flies. About eight years ago, yeah. But gee, I'd seen him just about three or four months before that and he looked good, you know, high spirits and everything. And then when Bobby told me that his father was in a bad way there, he says, "You ought to go see him, he'd like to see you." "Well, what's the matter with him?" Boy, I could not believe it when I went up to visit him. My God, it didn't do me no good to do, to go see him, because it really broke me up to see that poor man that way, the way he was, you know, so high spirited and everything. And that poor guy just sat there, you know. Thank God the boys were around to kind of lift me up a little bit. And he's one guy that you can't say anything detrimental against, can't say anything at all about Bobby. Bobby was one hell of a good boy, ever since I've known him. And I got acquainted with him, when I come out of the service we belonged to the Knights of Columbus together, you know, that's how I got acquainted with him then.

JR: Great. I think we've just about got it done.

CB: Well, maybe. Yeah, I did, I have met some wonderful people, though. That's another thing, there's pros, to everything there's a pro and a con. And the pro on that is that regardless of what I got out of it financially, I did meet a hell of a lot of good people, I did meet a hell of a lot of good people, you know. And I'm not talking about guys like Kefauver or this one and the other one, I'm talking about everyday ordinary people like the fishermen in the counties there, in Washington County and Waldo County, you know. When they were state committeemen, you know, I met them on there, they were state committeemen, you know, Jim Sawyer, I don't know what, Jim must have passed away by now. Hugh Conner, he's gone, you know. In fact we had a big rally over to his house one time when Clint Clauson was running for governor, you know.

And then Ed Kennedy was there, young man then. Very personable chap, you know, but then he started getting in with the topsides there, they're getting down, instead of going up he's going down. Now he's not worth a damn, you know, and it's a detriment to the party now to have somebody like that in there, honest to goodness. Gee. And of course he never had it tough, so he doesn't know what it's like to be tough, but I mean the Democrats have always proposed a

good time, a good life for the poor people, you know. And that's, regardless of what your stature is, but there are no more ordinary people in the Democratic Party, with the exception of a few.

John Baldacci's one of them that's an ordinary person, but I don't know how many more there are in the whole Democratic Party in Washington, that way, you know. And we're fortunate that he's from Maine, and that's why I say I'm certain he'll be elected as governor, really and truly. Because his personality alone, you know, he's got a good memory, he remembers people, you know. And he brings himself down, I mean, he doesn't bring himself down, but he'll talk at your level. He won't look down, you'll say, hello John, hi Mr. Baldacci. Hi. And go talk to his friends again, you know. Hi, he'll go over and talk to you, you know, and spend a few seconds with you, you know what I mean. So that's the way he is. That's why I, that's the way I've thought of him ever since I can remember, you know, and I've known him ever since infancy, when he was born, you know, I've known him all those years. And I can't ever find it, growing up as a boy, any of them boys, you know. I'd tell him, Bob, God bless you, God's been good to you, he gave you some beautiful boys, all good boys, every one of them, you know. As far as the girls are concerned, I don't know them too well, you know, but, and Joey I didn't see, because they're the last three, Lisa and Anna and, not Anna, what's her name, Lisa was one of them, Maria I guess it is. See, I can't even remember. And Joey, the last three, I didn't know them too well, you know what I mean. But all the others I knew, you know, I knew.

So I guess I must have said it.

JR: Yeah, great interview, thank you very much.

CB: A little boring, but still.

JR: Not at all, not at all.

End of Interview
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