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Dennis, Janet oral history interview

Andrea L'Hommedieu

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Interview with Janet Dennis by Andrea L'Hommedieu

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Dennis, Janet

Interviewer

L'Hommedieu, Andrea

Date

April 21, 1999

Place

Waterville, Maine

ID Number

MOH 084

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Biographical Note

Janet Dennis was born to Clemenza Rowlandson Sullivan and William Aloysius Sullivan on September 5, 1945 in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. Her father was a postal inspector for the U.S. Post Office and he was raised in a Democratic family. She was raised in a Republican family in Waterville, Maine, where her mother was a schoolteacher in parochial schools. She was the youngest of five children. She attended Thomas College for secretarial services. After that, she was Senator Muskie's secretary in Washington for one year beginning in May of 1965. She worked as a Senate Office manager for Senator Muskie in Waterville and Augusta. Janet also did senatorial work for the Senate Public Works Committee in the Subcommittee on Air and Water Pollution under Leon Billings until May of 1970. She married Richard Hollis Dennis, Jr.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: Waterville, Maine and Kennebec County; Waterville mills: Scott Paper Company, Hathaway Shirt, Keyes Fiber, Winedot Wollen Mill; Oakland Mills: Cascade Woolen Mill and Diamond International; Colby College; Thomas College; Catholicism in Waterville; University of Maine at Orono; Washington, D.C.; Early stages of Capitol police force; Subcommittee on Air and Water Pollution; Federal Housing Project; Farmer's Home

project; Muskie's environmental contributions; William Loeb's attack on Jane Muskie; Kennebec River; Iran hostage crisis; Lakewood Theater, Skowhegan; and Lebanese population.

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Transcript

Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview conducted by Andrea L'Hommedieu on April 21st, 1999 with Janet Dennis at her home in Waterville, Maine. Janet, would you please state your full name and spell it?

Janet Dennis: Sure. It's Janet Sullivan, that's my maiden name, Dennis. That's D-E-N-N-I-S.

AL: And when and where were you born?

JD: I was actually born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, September 5th, 1945.

AL: And what are the names of your parents?

JD: My mother's name was Clemenza, (strange names in my family), Clemenza Rowlandson Sullivan, she came from Lowell, Massachusetts. My father's name was William Aloysius Sullivan. His family's from upstate New York, Ogdensburg, New York.

AL: And where did you grow up?

JD: We moved to Maine when I was four years old, so Waterville has pretty much always been

my home.

AL: How many children were in your family and what are their names?

JD: There were five children. The oldest was Modwena Mary Sullivan, then the next one was Theresa Geraldina, and then Katheryn Ann, William Aloysius, Jr., and then I was the baby of the family.

AL: Has anyone else in your family besides yourself been politically involved?

JD: No, not at all. My father was a Democrat. It was said of his mother that she would have voted for the devil himself as long as he was a Democrat. My mother came from Republican people, but neither one of them were active or involved. I can remember, my father was a postal inspector, and can remember him being very angry at the Republicans for trying to close down post offices, some of the smaller post offices. And I can remember his anger in particular being against Margaret Chase Smith, just because he worked for the post office. But no one really was active politically.

AL: And what did your mother do, did she stay home and take care of all the children?

JD: Yes, she did. She, my father died unexpectedly when I was about ten years old. At that point she had to go out and go to work, so she became a schoolteacher. Fortunately she had a college education and so, when I was about ten, (so we're talking '55, '54), Dad died unexpectedly so she went out and taught school.

AL: Where did she teach?

JD: Where? She taught right here in Waterville for the parochial schools. She taught for a while at Sacred Heart School which is the parish school, and then St. Joseph's Maranite School, elementary level.

AL: And what were their religious backgrounds?

JD: Catholic, Roman Catholic, very strong Catholic. My father at one time studied for the priesthood and I have a sister who is a nun, so.

AL: You've talked a little bit about their political attitudes. What about social attitudes?

JD: I'm not really sure. They both had college degrees, which was not the norm in those days, especially for women. My mother was one of eleven children and all but one had a college education, and it was the oldest one; it was a daughter, a woman. She didn't have the opportunity because it was expected that she would stay home and take care of all the other children. And then when her parents were older she had to stay home and take care of them. So she never got married; she never had that opportunity that the rest of them had. One of my aunts was the first woman to graduate from Tufts Dental College. She actually is my namesake, my godmother. I

think my parents believed in helping others and they did a lot of charity work, but it was mostly done through the church. I can remember my mother cooking extra food. And she would frequently take meals to the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, who had no means of income.

AL: How did your family affect you as you grew up?

JD: My father was definitely the head of the household. He was very domineering. You didn't ask questions, you did as you were told. It would never occur to any of us to question. If we were told to do something we did it, and he ruled with an iron fist. I was the youngest of five so I was the baby of the family. And I guess probably not as much was expected of me as it was of the older.

AL: Do you feel as you've grown up that you're very much like your parents in political attitudes or religious beliefs and social outlooks?

JD: I'm definitely more active and more liberal than either of them. As far as religious beliefs, my religious beliefs are similar but not as strong, and I was never as strict in enforcing those beliefs on my children.

AL: What were some of the other influences on you besides your family, growing up?

JD: I attended parochial schools all my life with that same atmosphere. You just did not, you did as you were told, you just didn't ask questions. And then my father died when I was only ten so that pretty much affected the whole family. You know, there were some hard financial times; we were all expected to contribute. As we got older we worked and helped to contribute towards the family.

AL: When and where did you meet your husband?

JD: I met my husband on a blind date when I was a junior in high school and he was a senior. And that was in September of '61, a few years ago.

AL: And did you go to college?

JD: Yes I did. I was fortunate to be able to go. I went to Thomas College; I took a two-year secretarial course. And the reason why Thomas is because that's all we could afford and I lived at home so I didn't have that college experience. But I had the education and considered myself fortunate under the circumstances.

AL: And where is your husband's family from?

JD: His mother is from Palmer, Massachusetts; his father's from Roxbury, Massachusetts. My husband was also born in Pittsburgh and he moved here at about age five. His father's a, well, he's retired now, a doctor in town, an eye doctor, ophthalmologist.

AL: And what is your husband's name?

JD: Richard Hollis Dennis, Jr.

AL: Does he share your involvement in politics?

JD: No, absolutely not. He's not interested in politics whatsoever. He's ultra conservative; I would say he's a Republican. However he did look up to and admire Muskie for his intelligence and his honesty.

AL: Did he, do you have lively discussions about politics at the table or is that something you don't talk about too much at home?

JD: Occasionally we do. Not so much about political figures but about the war in Kosovo, he has very strong feelings, which are different than mine.

AL: What was the Waterville community like when you were growing up, you know, socially, economically, religiously, ethnically?

JD: Socially, I think people, I don't think there was a lot of money. But people were able to (because of our location, where we lived), had the opportunity to, if they, you didn't own a camp at the lake, you could make day trips just a few miles away; skiing in the winter, boating. An occasional trip, which was a big trip, to go up to Lakewood Theater in Skowhegan. And we were fortunate; we did that probably once a year. But that was, you know, a big adventure for our family, certainly.

Economically, Waterville was a mill town certainly, a lot of industry, Scott Paper Company, Hathaway Shirt, Keyes Fiber, Wyandotte Woolen Mill, Diamond International in Oakland, and Cascade Woolen Mill in Oakland. We did have the cultural experience of two colleges, which made it nice, having Colby and Thomas.

As far as religious, a large percent of the community was Catholic. Waterville alone has three Roman Catholic churches, two for the, this is back years ago; I mean we still have those churches but the rest were The fact that two of them were French -speaking and one was for the English -speaking. And then we had a Lebanese church, which was a Catholic but it was the Eastern rite, and also the Blessed Sacrament. So that's a total of five Catholic churches just in Waterville which, I think back then we're talking a population of about eighteen thousand, and that may even include the college population. Several Protestant churches around and a synagogue. You wanted to know about ethnically, clearly a large portion of the population was Franco American and a smaller community of Lebanese in the area. The city was divided really into the north end and the south end. The south end is where most of the French people lived, the north end other groups, including English-Irish. The Lebanese community was mostly situated on the Kennebec River down by, oh, where the Wyandotte Woolen Mill was, that's where George Mitchell grew up.

AL: And how about politically?

JD: I think at the time Waterville was mostly considered to be a Democratic city even though the state itself was a Republican state. I think that's probably because they were all mill workers, hard-working people. In fact I would view the city as a Democratic city.

AL: Can you tell me a little bit about in what ways Waterville has changed over the years?

JD: We're no longer the industrial city that we were. We've lost a good portion of the mills, we've lost Cascade, Diamond International, Scott Paper's gone, we almost lost Hathaway. Fortunately that was salvageable. So pretty much now we're down to Keyes Fiber and the Hathaway. I think Waterville now is considered to be mostly service-oriented. We have three hospitals, a large medical center community, and we have two colleges.

AL: Could you tell me a little bit about others in this community, or people you've known who would be valuable sources for this project?

JD: Well one person I can think of would be Marsha Gray Pelletier, who is Senator Muskie's niece. She lives in Winslow now; I think she's probably the only niece or nephew that's around here now. I think the rest of them have all moved away. Joan Arnold, Joanie worked for Muskie when he was governor, and I believe Joanie was a friend of Jane Muskie's as well. John Jabar, he was Senator Muskie's field representative here in the Waterville office for a while; Johnny Jabar is the one who actually hired me when I was in school and going to D.C. Dr. Robert Dubord who is the brother to Dick Dubord who was a close confidant of Muskie's. And I don't know if the Dubord sons . . . There were two sons, Steve and Bill, and they're both lawyers with a, they would be somebody that could contribute. Of course Nancy Hill, former mayor of Waterville, very active Democrat, very outspoken. Dr. Ed Ervin; Dr. Ervin was a ped- , retired pediatrician in town. I believe he took care of the Muskie children, but I also believe that he and his wife were friends of the Muskie's. I know they always contributed, you know, to his campaigns, and I believe they were friends as well.

Maybe either John or Paul Mitchell, Senator Mitchell's brothers --, John being Swisher, the famous basketball player. Former mayor Spike Carey, Richard Carey. A couple of other people that, the two people I have in mind unfortunately are deceased, but their children might have something to contribute. And one of them is Jimmy Thibodeau, who lives here in Waterville. His father was Arthur Thibodeau, who hunted and fished with Muskie. They called him Tibby. Tibby actually, some, Dr. Garcelon, I think it was Garcelon from Augusta, gave to Senator Muskie a beagle and Tibby took care of the beagle. He boarded the beagle and he trained the beagle. And he's now deceased but his son Jimmy might be able to relate some of the hunting and fishing stories. And then the other person of course, it would have been Gene Letourneau, the famous sports writer from Maine who also did a lot of hunt-, a lot of hunting and fishing with Senator Muskie. He's deceased now; he has a son in town who is a doctor, Dr. Frederick Letourneau. He was the oldest of the children so I, either he or his sister, Jeanne Codere, might be able to contribute something. And then Bob Marden is another person who I had in mind.

AL: Let's start with your work, when you worked in Senator Muskie's office. When and how did you come to work for Senator Muskie?

JD: My senior year at Thomas, I think it was 1965, the Washington office was looking for two people to fill positions in D.C. They contacted the college and my girlfriend and I decided to apply for the positions. That's something I probably wouldn't have done. I was not adventuresome, but the fact that there were two of us that could go, I was willing to take that step. And fortunately it worked out. We both got hired and we both went to D.C. and got hooked.

AL: Was that the beginning of your political interest, when you took that job, or had you already, did you really have a strong interest to do something politically?

JD: No, I had no interest whatsoever in politics or, not even I don't think a clear understanding of how it all worked. I arrived in D.C. and I was just enthralled and just taken up by it all, and just drawn into the excitement of working on the Hill and working for Senator Muskie.

AL: So you started in Washington, D.C.?

JD: Yes, I did.

AL: And what were your positions in that office?

JD: Excuse me, when I first went down I worked in his senatorial office, from May of '65 to August of '66. I served as receptionist and also doing clerical works, secretarial work, typing, answering correspondence and things of that nature. In, I returned to Maine in August of '66 to get married and I stayed here for the school semester while my husband finished up at the University of Maine.

AL: In Orono?

JD: Yes, but I wanted to go back to D.C. He had also, my husband had worked in D.C. . . . He was fortunate, he was Capitol policeman and back in those days it was a patronage position. He was appointed by Senator Muskie as a Capitol policeman. This was before the bombs and the threats, and now it's clearly a professional police force, but back then it was students. So we, when he finished up his school at the university, we returned to D.C., and at that time there were no positions open in the senatorial office. But Leon Billings was looking for somebody, so he interviewed me and fortunately, I got the job. So I worked on the Subcommittee on Air and Water Pollution under Leon for, well, until May of 1970. And at that time we decided to return to Maine to raise our family. But in between having, (and I thought I would not go back to work, that I would stay home and raise my family), but in between having three children I kept going back to work, I just was drawn to it. I was fortunate because my mother was able to take care of the children. So it wasn't, you know, that problem that so many mothers have to experience trying to find a babysitter, and . . .

AL: Could you talk to me a little bit about who were some of the other people in the office, and describe them for me?

JD: Okay, I guess we'll start with the D.C. office, when I was working there. The first person I dealt the most with of course was Gayle Cory, and you just couldn't say enough good things about Gayle, she was just a wonderful person. Highly respected on the Hill, very knowledgeable. Don Nicoll was the AA at the time; Bob Shepherd was the press secretary. The chief legislative aid, I'm not sure that that was his title, was Chip Stockford, Nancy O'Mara [Ezold] was on the staff. A couple of people that I knew from back in this area, from the Waterville-Fairfield area, Sandy Poulin and Kathy Keup. Virginia Pitts was, did a lot of legislative work and a lot of, I remember handling military cases; she was actually retired military. I can't remember where in Maine she was born, but . . . Fern Burns Campbell, she got married while she was there, she was from the Augusta area, and she was actually Don Nicoll's secretary for a while. And Jane Fenderson, Jane worked very closely with Don Nicoll I believe mostly doing the legislative work. Mary Ellen Fullam, who's from Waterville, was there for a short while, and she worked with Bob Shepherd in the press office. Mary Ellen Fullam's father was Professor [Paul] Fullam who . . . To be honest with you I can not remember whether he taught history at Colby or where he taught . . .

AL: He taught at Colby.

JD: Did he teach at Colby? Okay. Because it may, he may have been even deceased at the time that I went to D.C. because I never knew him. But I've just heard of him and how he was a close friend of the senator's. And, you know, Mary Ellen was his daughter. They had two children, Mary Ellen and a son. Mary Ellen was on the staff; I think she left before I did and went to Europe. That was the last I heard of Mary Ellen.

AL: So you don't know where she lives now?

JD: No, I really don't. I'm not even sure if Mrs. Fullam, who was a school teacher, actually my husband had her in school, whether she is still living or around; I really don't know. And then Peggy O'Neil, she was my friend from Thomas College. Well, actually I went to school with her all the way through from Sacred Heart to Mount Mercy; I went to an all-girls Catholic high school here in town. And then we went to Thomas and went to D.C. together. Peggy was on the staff, she left again before I did. She went to California to be married.

Work on the committee, when I went back to D.C. the, excuse me, the second time . . . Basically the Subcommittee on Air and Water Pollution consisted of Leon Billings and myself for a very, very long time. And when I think of, when I think back, I just wonder how Leon did all that he did with just the two of us. The volume of mail that we received in that office was phenomenal, and somehow we did it. I don't remember exactly when, but Senator Jennings Randolph from West Virginia was chairman of the committee. And he hired somebody, a Richard Grundy, and brought Richard in, so then there were three of us. But, and then when I returned to Maine, the district office consisted of Marge Hutchinson, her sister Doris Cyr and myself. Then Sue Gurney was hired, (she's from Winslow), and John Delahanty was hired. And

this was at the time they were opening other offices.

AL: Did you say, I'm sorry, did you say John or Tom?

JD: John. John Delahanty.

AL: John. Any relation to Tom?

JD: Tom's brother. John is a lawyer, he lives in the Lewiston-Auburn area. His father was Tom Delahanty the judge, so John and Tom are brothers. And John was, became probably, I believe, the first field representative out of the Lewiston office that we opened, that we were At that point we were expanding. There was just a phenomenal amount of work so they were putting offices elsewhere in the state. And then it, after Marge retired and then they hired Beverly Bustin [Bustin-Hatheway], former state senator Bev Bustin; she was a field representative. I think that's about it.

AL: Can you tell me a little bit about Marge Hutchinson? Who she was, how long she was with Muskie? Anything you know.

JD: Sure. Marge was a wonderful person, very kind, compassionate. She first started working for Senator Muskie when he opened his law practice, and I believe this was before he served in the Navy. He had his law practice and when he left to go in the Navy she stayed in the office. , I don't know whether there were any other lawyers in the office, but she kept the office going. I would say Marge was more than an assistant to the senator, they were good friends. , Marge was good friends with the family as well. Jane and the children were always calling Marge for information, for her to do things for them. Marge was very loyal to Senator Muskie. When he was elected governor, she went to Augusta to work with him. And then when he was elected to the Senate, she actually went to D.C. for a few months, just a short period, to set up the office, and at that time I think it was Gayle Cory, Joanne [Amnott] Hoffmann (Nordy Hoffmann's wife), and probably Don Nicoll. I mean, I think that's pretty much what they started out with. And Marge of course come back to Waterville where they kept a district office. And Marge continued to work for Senator Muskie as field representative for years. She retired I think in the late '70s when she was diagnosed with cancer and became too ill to work.

AL: So she was, she was still running this office from Maine through most of his Senate career.

JD: Absolutely, absolutely. Probably the two people that knew Muskie the best would have been Gayle Cory and Marge Hutchinson and then probably Don Nicoll. They saw him at his best and probably saw him at his worst.

AL: Could you tell me a little more about Doris Cyr?

JD: Doris was Marge's sister. There were several children in that family, and I don't know the ranking. I believe Doris was older than Marge. Doris was there working when I started working there, so I don't know how long she had been there. I don't think she had been there for years,

certainly. I think she'd been there a short while, not for years. Doris served as a receptionist. And she was the front line and protector for anyone who wanted to see Marge. They had to go through Doris, and Doris protected her sister, Marge. If someone was in the office that was, you know, maybe raising their voice or getting a little out of hand, Doris would, and Doris was a little tiny thing, where Marge was tall and statuesque, Doris would just go marching in and politely escort the unruly constituent out. But, then Doris retired when her husband got real sick. So she stayed home to take care of him, and that was before Marge retired.

AL: Were there some local political leaders from Muskie's era that stand out in your mind in the Waterville area?

JD: You know, I really can only think of a few. One of them of course would be former mayor Richard Carey. He was from the south end of town, he was highly respected in the community. He was mayor for several terms. Al Bernier who is a lawyer, also a former mayor of Waterville, and Richard Dubord of course; again, Richard was mayor of Waterville at one time. Dr. Kevin and Nancy Hill, Professor Fullam, and I really don't have that much knowledge on Professor Fullam, only stories. And Dick McMahan, if you've come across Dick's name. Great, great person. He could have had some stories for you.

AL: Was he from the Waterville area?

JD: Winslow.

AL: Winslow.

JD: Yeah, yeah. I can't remember which federal agency he worked for before he retired. It was either Federal Housing or Farmer's Home, what was Farmer's Home then. But he worked for the federal government and retired, would have lots of stories if he were still living.

AL: Did he hold political office at all that you know of?

JD: No. I don't think he himself held office sort of (*unintelligible word*) but I think he was very instrumental in Senator Muskie's being elected.

AL: How did Senator Muskie relate to his staff, both in Washington and when he would come to Maine? In other words, how did he run his office? How much did, say, Marge in Maine and Gayle Cory in Washington, how much influence did they have on how the office was run? How did it all work?

JD: I believe that clearly Senator Muskie didn't want to be bothered with the minute details and didn't concern himself with the running of the office, from what I could see. He had good people around him who made those decisions: Don, Gayle, Marge. He related well to certain staff, but clearly I don't believe was interested in knowing his staff. They worked for him and they worked together for a common goal or a common cause, but, and I don't mean that negatively. I think he was just such a bright man, so focused on what he was doing that there

wasn't time for any personal contact or personal feeling. And I don't think of the, I don't believe any of the staff looked upon that begrudgingly or badly, it's just the way it was. When he came, like when he would come home to Maine and come in to the Waterville office, and he'd come in quite a bit, he would come in and he would march through. He'd go in and talk to Marge and march in to his little space and kind of would nod to you when he went by, not sure he knew who you were or what your name was.,

But I can remember one time when I was working on the subcommittee, I had to go over to the Capitol for something. , I ran into him over in the Capitol. He clearly knew that I was connected to him somehow, but I don't think he knew that it was there and not his senatorial office. And he says, "Oh, are you going back to the office? Would you take this stuff for me?" Clearly, you know, didn't know my name, knew I was connected somehow. But, of course he had a lot of people working for him and there was a turnover.

AL: And you said you left his office in what year?

JD: The senatorial office or the, when I left to come back to Maine?

AL: When you left his office in Maine.

(Telephone interruption.) Let's pause right there.

AL: Could you tell me how Muskie's office changed over time?

JD: Sure. The demands on the district office staff increased tremendously to the point of expanding the staff, adding people, adding offices in other parts of the state. Gradually we opened an office in Portland, Biddeford, Rockland, Bangor, Presque Isle, and eventually Augusta, that was near the end. Actually I think I may be confused, the Augusta office was opened under Senator Mitchell. What we did in the district office pretty much was constituent services. Constituents who had a problem with the federal government, with the red tape, Social Security, VA, whatever, they would come to us. The district office was the front line for Senator Mitchell's, Senator Muskie's, excuse me, constituents. Over the years the constituents expected more and more from the congressional office I think partially due to the frustration of dealing with the federal government and the red tape.

The office over the years provided more and more social type services and, not all congressional offices work that way. Some, if a constituent came in and had a problem, they would say, "Here's the phone. This is the agency you need to go to and here's the phone number. See you." Clearly that is not how we operated. We would do the legwork for the constituent; we would take the problem on and we would try and resolve it. We'd go to the agencies, get the answers, write letters on behalf of constituents who were having problems. And I think, we handled it that way, and the large part was due to Senator Muskie's desire to help the constituent and Marge's compassion. She was a very compassionate person and had compassion towards people, and wanted to do as much as you could for them. Obviously they come to you for a reason. They've been everywhere else and they're desperate; they just don't know what else to

do.

AL: You may have answered this a little bit, but what were the differences between working in Washington and working in Maine?

JD: In D.C. you probably had more contact with the member, Senator Muskie. The type of work that was done in D.C. was mostly legislative and projects, where the, back in the district offices you were doing the casework. In Maine you didn't have that adrenaline rush and excitement of working on the Hill. Sometimes it wasn't always glamorous. It was the same every day, everyday stuff. But you felt like you were doing something, helping people, and you'd certainly try.

AL: When did you leave Senator Muskie's office and when did you go to work for George Mitchell?

JD: I worked for Senator Muskie right up until the end. He was confirmed as Secretary of State in May of 1980 I believe, and I, from there, stayed right in the same spot, the same office, and worked for Senator Mitchell.

AL: What was your role in his office?

JD: It was very similar, doing casework. , I was considered to be a caseworker. When Senator Mitchell opened an office in Augusta, then I became a field representative in the Waterville office. At that point Waterville was a satellite office for the Augusta office. And, you know, I think clearly Waterville wouldn't have been the choice of anyone to have a district office, other than Muskie started out here and Mitchell's hometown, and you just don't close offices.

AL: Now what is a field representative and how is that different from the job you had?

JD: A field representative, you're still doing a lot of casework, you're picking up more projects type work. As a field representative you might go to an event to represent the senator, read a statement for him, go to more public outside meetings, rather than sitting in the office doing the every day case work. And the field representative for both Senator Muskie and Senator Mitchell would travel with him when he was in the area that that office was responsible for.

AL: Did you see over time differences in the way Muskie and Mitchell's offices ran?

JD: I think the differences were with the men themselves, not the running of the office. While both men were highly respected, intelligent and caring people, there was a warmth about Senator Mitchell that you didn't have with Senator Muskie. And as I said, the Waterville office was an unusual place to have a district office, but that's where Senator Muskie, you know, got married and raised his family. His wife Jane Gray is from Waterville, had his law office here. And then Senator Mitchell grew up in Waterville, went to high school. As a matter of fact [he] graduated from high school with one or two of my sisters, was in school at the same time;, graduated with one of them.

We rented private space, Senator Muskie did, up over a bank on the main street, Depositor's Trust Bank. And when I think about it now, we wouldn't have gotten away with it. It was upstairs, you had to climb steep steps, many steps to get to it. It just certainly wasn't handicapped accessible. And when Senator Mitchell came on, we stayed there for a while, but this, I don't remember when we're talking about, probably '82, '81-'82, the, Waterville built a brand new post office building. It wasn't a federal building but it was a post office building, rather than a GSA building I mean, and they had space in that building. So we moved to that building, which had an elevator and certainly was handicapped accessible.

But I think the differences were in the men, not in the work you did. Or, and obviously, you know, Senator Mitchell was trained under Senator Muskie when he worked in, first, when he went to Washington. He was a Georgetown, actually he worked for an insurance company, then they hired him while he was going to Georgetown Law.

AL: What are some of the memorable events or circumstances from your experiences in politics?

JD: I guess, maybe these are just some thoughts, I don't know.

AL: Just thoughts or just remembrances of certain occasions that struck you as funny or poignant, maybe something that illustrates Muskie's character or abilities, Mitchell's character or abilities?

JD: The job was not always glamorous, but you felt like you were contributing, you were doing something. And it was exciting to be a small part of the beginning of the environmental laws in this country. I remember the excitement when Senator Muskie was picked to be Hubert Humphrey's running mate in 1968 and then again when he ran for president in '72. You also remember the disappointment when the tide turned during the '72 campaign when, after William Loeb had attacked Jane Muskie. And I often wonder what the big commotion was, whether they were tears or they weren't tears. You want to say, "I if they were tears, so what?" You know, this was a man who loved his wife, loved his family, was there defending her and her character, a man who probably was physically exhausted from going from one end of the country to the other. I remember the hours involved in packing up all of Senator Muskie's files. I mean, we had, files and memorabilia in the Waterville office. We had files in the office, which went back to his law days. They were actually law, his law files that were in there for various clients of his. And, you know, kind of sad packing them all up and going through some of them, and, boxes and boxes, unbelievable.

AL: I think I've seen some of them at the archives.

JD: I'm sure you have. I can remember, too, when we went to visit the library and all the staff was there. And I think this was the time, probably when it was dedicated. And they had the busload that came up from D.C., and it was during a hurricane. It was unbelievable, they were crossing the And this bus load of, you know, people coming up for this from D.C., they

were crossing, I don't know if it was the Tappansee Bridge or the George Washington Bridge. And it was so bad, they said it was unbelievable, the hurricane, the winds. But we had a beautiful, I remember, sunny day, the day of the dedication. Former President Carter was there. But when we, the staff was given a tour and we went in to this one room I remember as being a kind of a working room, and in the middle of the table was this huge amount of paper clips. And a couple of the staff people from the library who were there working said, "Did you people ever, why did you staple everything?" And they were saving the staples because they couldn't believe everything was stapled, stapled, stapled. And

AL: I'm going to stop right there and turn the tape over.

End of Side One
Side Two

AL: We are now on side B of the interview with Janet Dennis on April 21st, 1999 in Waterville, Maine. Janet, earlier we were talking about your work on the Subcommittee on Air and Water Pollution. What direct involvements did you have with Senator Muskie in relation to that?

JD: I actually served as secretary to Leon Billings during that period. My job consisted of answering correspondence dealing with environmental issues. We received a large number of letters from all over the country, and our number one priority was to answer the mail that came from Maine first and foremost. I would help set up for hearings when they were having hearings. I did get to travel a bit; we held hearings out in California in Santa Barbara. We, those were I think thermo -pollution hearings. Went to hearings in Key Biscayne, Florida, and I think all of these seem to have been thermo if I remember correctly. We had hearings here in New Hampshire when they were, concerning the Seabrook power plant as well as in Maine when they were con-, you know, before the Maine Yankee had opened up. So, you know, I did travel when we had hearings. We had hearings in Washington, a lot of hearings. And [I] helped set those up, and witness list testimony. And when we would have, the conference committee would meet after, you know, both the House and the Senate had different versions. , I would sit in on those meetings and just be available if anything was needed. Clearly Leon was the staff person.

AL: What do you think Senator Muskie's major qualities were?

JD: Obviously intelligent, compassionate, loyal, hard -working. I think that these were all part of who he was, or part of his growing up, you know, his family upbringing. He was committed to a cause or a belief, certainly proved that in his hard work with environmental legislation. He had a lot of foresight, tolerance for opposing views.

AL: Do you remember events or circumstances that illustrated his character and ability?

JD: As far as his tolerance for opposing views, it reminds me of when he was running for vice president and he was speaking to an audience where he was being drowned out by the Vietnam War protestors. When the majority of the crowd was becoming annoyed with the protestors, Senator Muskie invited one of the group of protestors to come up on stage and voice their

opinions, and he listened. He, so many times I remember sitting in hearings or, in conference committee meetings, listening to a lot of talk and a lot of commotion going on and nobody paying attention to what was going on, total inattentiveness until Senator Muskie spoke;, everyone stopped and listened. And it wasn't that he was raising his voice, I think people just respected him and admired him.

I think I said loyal, I don't know if this fits. If somebody above you can be loyal to the people below you, I think it fits. Before Senator Muskie left office, he was meeting with Governor Brennan who, as you know, Governor Brennan was going to appoint the replacement. And the one thing that Senator Muskie asked of the governor, when he selected the replacement, would he please convey to the replacement that Senator Muskie would appreciate it if full consideration could be given to keeping the staff. He really, and I really believe he felt for the staff, was concerned for the staff. So I guess that would be loyal. Usually you think of it the other way around, the staff being loyal to the member, but clearly

AL: What influences do you think Senator Muskie had on Maine?

JD: Under Senator Muskie's direction, the nation's environmental laws clearly affected the health not only of the nation, I mean, not only in Maine but the nation, but clearly Maine was affected. We have cleaner air, we can all breathe a little easier. I remember when my family, my husband and I and the children first started making, taking boat trips down the Kennebec River. We would put the boat in in Hallowell and go down the river, and oh, the filth and the debris! And we used to joke, "If anything goes overboard, including the kids, they stay, we don't bring them back in the boat." You know, the river was so filthy. But because of Ed Muskie and his commitment to the environment we can now make that same trip, clean, much cleaner, there's not the waste debris, the filth.

I think Maine has been very, very fortunate in all its representatives that we've sent to Washington. When you are actually down there and working there and you see some of the other representatives that other states send, you say, "Boy, are we lucky. We are lucky." Yeah. And I think Ed Muskie stands out as one of the best.

AL: Have we missed anything important from your experience that you would like others to know about you and your time?

JD: I don't know how important this is, this is just something that happened at the end of Senator Muskie's stay in office. It was a few days before Senator Muskie was to be confirmed as Secretary of State, and the Waterville office was visited by approximately fifteen Colby College students who decided to have a sit-in in the office to protest the war in Iran, the botched attempt to rescue the hostages. And I think if I remember correctly at the time President Carter had either extended or was about to extend an invitation to the Shah of Iran to come to the U.S. So we had some very angry college students. They arrived with their backpacks; they were there to stay.

The first thing we did was obviously notify Washington. I think at that point Leon had already

moved, Leon, Gayle and a few others had already moved down to the State Department even before it was confirmed. They knew it was going through. So Jim Case at the time was the AA and Jim said, "Let them stay, they can stay as long as they want," he says, "we'll clear it with the landlord first." So we did do that. We checked with the landlord because we were, this was the bank, you know, they may not have wanted those students there. But the people at the bank said, "Whatever Ed Muskie wants, we'll do." And the students were allowed to stay. And the reasoning behind that was they didn't, you know, Senator Muskie and Muskie's staff didn't want to have anything that would tarnish his record at the very end. I mean, if you had the police hauling these kids out and the press and just So they stayed three days, two nights, and we had to staff the office day and night. They weren't really disruptive, but they were there. I slept one, we took turns, I slept there one night and it was actually the last night. And in the middle of the night Jim Case came up from Washington because they knew that this wouldn't go on forever. So Jim Case flew up and it was the day that Muskie was actually confirmed and sworn in to be Secretary of State. They waited until that night, about one o'clock in the morning, and called the police and the police came and escorted them out of the building. At that point, Muskie was no longer senator. There was no reason for them to be there, and I think they were ready to go. There was no resistance whatsoever, they just quietly got up and left. But that was just a, an interesting side line to Well, I can't think of anything else.

AL: Thank you very much for your time.

JD: Oh, you're welcome.

End of Interview

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