

Georgia's Political Heritage Program  
Excerpt of Interview with E.L.  
Interview date: August 12, 1996  
Interviewer: Mel Steely  
Transcriber: Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft; February 2004

[Begin Tape 1, Side A.]

STEELY: I'm Mel Steely. This is former Congressman E.L. We're filming today on Congressman E.L.'s political recollections over his years in the Georgia legislature and the United States Congress. This is August the 12<sup>th</sup>, 1996.

E.L.: In the [past] few years, I've been making it a point of reading some of the ancient Greek and Roman histories, both fiction and nonfiction, and I thought to myself what a different world it would have been had, in those days, they had the technology to have recorded and put down the recollections of the Demosthenes[es] and...the Catos. What a different world it would be. I'm still trying to piece it together.

STEELY: Oh, it would have been marvelous if they could have done that, and then go back to your legislators and the philosophers, Euripides. Entertainment, the whole thing would have been marvelous. And then we'd have all of that. In fact, we'd be inundated.

E.L.: The problem is it's going to be the culling of information in order to make it usable because there's so much of it. ...

STEELY: Okay, let's get going. [I'm going to ask] the first eight or ten questions about your personal background, just so that the scholars in the future will have some idea of who you are and where you came from, that sort of thing, and then move fairly quickly into politics. We won't go into personal stuff: marriages, children, that sort of thing. You feel free to bring it in at any point you want to, but we focus primarily on politics.

Okay, Mr. L, you were born in Atlanta on December the 26<sup>th</sup>, 1930, at the start of the Great Depression. Would you tell us a little about your parents and your family background?

E.L.: I was the second child. I have an older brother, who was born seven years before

me. His name is T. My father was L.J.L. He came to Atlanta in the early part of the twentieth century, in the early teens of the twentieth century, having immigrated here from Ireland by way of England, and came here and put his roots down. I think he spent a while in New York before he moved to Atlanta, but my sense is that once he got to Atlanta, he decided this is where he wanted to stay, and even though he had offers and opportunities to move on to other places, this became his home, and he became very committed to Atlanta and Georgia and this area.

He also was always very proud of his Irish roots and was a member of the Ancient Order of Hibernians for many, many years, until he died. At the same time, he was a passionate Zionist, so he was both an Irish nationalist and a Zionist at the same time, as well as being a particularly strong, patriotic American.

STEELY: And a Southerner.

E.L.: That's right. My mother came to this country as a very young girl. She was probably three or four years old when they came. People were never very accurate about birthdates in those days, but her family came here in bits and pieces from eastern Europe, from what is today Poland, I presume at that time would have either been Russia or Poland. They came to Atlanta, first an uncle and then the uncle brought another uncle and sisters and father and so forth. My mother came here. Her name was I.G.. Actually, the name G was a name they took. It was not the European name. According to family mythology, and there is some truth to this, the family name in Europe was Cavalier, or a Polanized [sic] version of Cavalier, Cavalareski or something like that, but it was Cavalier. When the family came to this country, as many immigrants were at that time going through immigration centers like Ellis Island and such, they did not want to have a European-sounding name, and so they listened to the names that were being used by people in the immigration line, and the name G was one they heard several times, so they adopted the name G at that time, although some of the family has gone back.

My mother's family apparently in Europe had been a sort of middle-class, factory-manager type group. They were also scholars. Several of my uncles had even gone back to Europe to study at yeshivas in Europe.

STEELY: Any rabbis on the family tree that you know of?

E.L.: The only one that I know for a fact—well, there's one today who's sort of a very prominent rabbi today in New Jersey, but the name L is found for the first time that we are aware of in a book that was written during the first century B.C. There was a Rabbi L, who was a teacher at one of the academies that the Jews had established to offset the Romanizing influence. He is quoted in one of the books of the Talmud with some aphorism. So we know we had a rabbi then. Between then and now, we probably had our share of horse thieves and everything else—

STEELY: [Laughs.]

E.L.: —but we do know that. But my grandmother, for example, my maternal grandmother, was a very well-educated woman, we know. I'm named for her. She actually taught people to read. There was a lot of illiteracy in a lot of the new immigrants, but she was one of the people who taught them to read. My maternal grandfather, whom I did know, was revered as a scholar, and people used to come over, I remember as a youngster, come over and study with him, so there was that tradition of scholarship.

My mother became very involved, as a lot of young women did in those days, in social issues. She was a social worker before the term became very clearly defined. She was the executive director of what today would have been called the Jewish community center. As part of her responsibility, she worked with people in the community who had social problems. She set up English classes to train immigrants in language and other things. She also worked with inmates at the federal penitentiary outside of Atlanta, Sunday school. My father taught at Sunday school out there. In fact, they met as a result of their work teaching Sunday school.

But I remember as a kid, she showed me a picture of her and Eugene Debs, who had been imprisoned for his views during World War I, and while she was working out there, she got to know Debs, and there's a photograph that we have in the album of her, and that was always very interesting to me.

But both of my parents were extremely involved, and I think this is relevant to our

discussion, in community and believed that and taught my brother and myself that you have social responsibilities, communal responsibilities, that you've got to be part of and involved in a community. They were very much so, in many ways.

STEELY: Was there ever any sense on your part that your parents did not expect you to succeed or worried about that or anything of that sort? Of course, in the beginning it was assumed that you would do well.

E.L.: I think that's right, Mel. It was expected that you would do well. My father and mother were both accomplished writers and speakers, community leaders. I'm not even sure there was an articulated expectation; I think it was just assumed you would get involved and you would become a leader. Whatever groups you were in, you would play your role and do what you needed to do. I think that's right.

And that was true in school. I remember, like most kids, there were things I wanted to do—go out and play softball or do something, miss a class or miss Sunday school or something like that. No way. I mean, that came first.

STEELY: Tell us a little bit, if you would, what it was like growing up in Atlanta during the Depression and World War II: your school, religious activities, clubs, that sort of thing.

E.L.: My father was a successful, for that time, life insurance agent, first for Metropolitan Life and later for New York Life. He was in that field for over sixty years, I guess. In fact, he was doing so well they wanted to transfer him as a branch manager to Richmond, but he would not go. He wanted to stay here, so he actually switched companies. But I think I would describe our family as sort of being middle class, in the almost Norman Rockwellian sense. It was middle class, not upper middle class, just middle class. We didn't have a lot of luxury items. Being second son in a two-son family, I suppose 90 percent of my clothes were clothes that had been worn by my brother. I remember when I was in high school—my first high school was Boys High School here in Atlanta—I got a jacket, a letter jacket. I remember it so well because it was one of the first few things that I had gotten sort of on my own and new.

But I grew up in Atlanta, amidst what is today called midtown Atlanta, over near what

was then Boys High, Tech High, and now Grady High. When I was about seven, we moved to the other side of Piedmont Park and Park Drive area, and that's where I grew up. It was typical middle class. Not a lot of luxuries, but I never was aware of the fact that I didn't have a lot of luxuries.

STEELY: Were you aware there was a Depression on at the time?

E.L.: I knew times were hard. We were not in a situation, because we lived in the city, where I was aware of it in the personal sense. We didn't have hardscrabble problems. But I was aware of it because—I mean, that was at a time when the WPA [Works Progress Administration] was very active, and I was exposed to the sights of people building things. The elementary school I went to—half of it was actually built as part of a WPA project, so I became aware of it.

Now, the other thing, which was related to the Depression, and I suppose my parents' social outlook on the world—Franklin Delano Roosevelt. There was always a picture of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in our house, in the same way that in a lot of Roman Catholic homes you'd see a picture of the Pope or some other icon. Franklin Roosevelt's picture was on the wall, and both my parents were very much followers of Franklin Roosevelt and his New Deal approach to solving the problems of the Depression, so there was talk at home about why.

I remember one of my earliest memories was being taken to Piedmont Park and being held in my father's arms, I think, when Franklin Roosevelt came to Piedmont Park to greet the crowd on his way to Warm Springs one time. I think it is an accurate recollection, but I certainly have the recollection of seeing that open roadster parked on the top of the hill, over the main athletic field at Piedmont Park, and Franklin Roosevelt being in the car.

So there was that. To the extent that Roosevelt and the New Deal were very much part of what I saw, I was aware of the Depression. Clothes were patched; socks were darned; we were never hungry, didn't realize that there were any shortages because I don't believe my father, who was the sole breadwinner of the family, ever lacked for that. But compared to the world in which middle-class children were brought up later, it was bare rather than plush.

STEELY: I remember my father was also an insurance man during that same period and had to go to a horse and buggy to handle his debits and that sort of stuff because there was no car, no gas or whatever. As you moved into the war and before that time, he really didn't have enough money for a car.

E.L.: I remember, speaking of the debits—because of your father, you'd recognize this—I remember my dad used to take me around with him when he would go into these neighborhoods on the south side of Atlanta, near Fulton Mill, and collect the twenty-five cents with his book

STEELY: That's right.

E.L.: And check it off.

STEELY: Do you still have the book?

E.L.: I think my brother may have the book. But that's when I saw people living tight. I mean, those were poor people.

STEELY: No question about it.

What was high school like at that time?

E.L.: I went to the Atlanta public schools, and they were, I suspect, good. They were, of course, a totally segregated system in those days. The elementary school I went to is very interesting because it was one of the first elementary schools that experimented with what we would today call progressive education. They didn't give grades. They gave reports. I always felt that I had been deprived of something because all my friends who went to other schools could say that they had A's or B's or whatever. I never saw that. But it was a very interesting educational experience that I went to. That was Inman School. Then I went to [Ocee?] Junior High School.

And then I went to Boys High School. It was segregated not just racially but also by gender as well. That high school was a very competitive high school in terms of academic and athletic activities. It was one which in many ways was defining. The faculty at that high school was outstanding. In fact, I could have gotten through my first two years of college based on that

experience at Boys High School. That's where your friends were.

I was also very active in extracurricular activities, both associated with the school and outside of the high school, itself. One of the things that was more difficult in terms of getting through it all was the fact that because my parents were Orthodox Jews, I went home, observed the dietary laws and things of that sort, and I had to spend four afternoons a week after school going to Hebrew school, religious school. That was true for years. And that was on top of everything else, so that was defining.

I belonged to social clubs, boys' social clubs outside the high school or school environment, and became very active in those types of organizations. There was, at that time—I think still is—an organization of Jewish youth that was national and very strong in the South, that had the initials AZA, which was the name of this group. I have friends today from North Carolina, Savannah, all over the country that I met through that organization, and I was very active in that. They had basketball tournaments, softball tournaments, debating, oratory. My brother was an orator in that organization. I won the national debate championship one year.

And so I had those activities in high school, we played in basketball tournaments all over the South and on occasions went to national conventions in New York or Indiana, which, for a youngster in those days, opened up my eyes to another world. It was before television, and you really didn't have the opportunity to see how other people lived, so it was a very important experience.

In high school, in addition to the academics and other extracurricular activity, the area that I got most involved in was in journalism, writing for the high school newspapers. I was sports editor of the Boys High newspaper and wrote the last farewell edition, the valedictory edition of the sports page of that newspaper. I came across a copy recently, and it was very interesting to read, re-read.

Then, when I went to Grady High School, from which I was graduated, I became editor of the newspaper, so I had a journalistic background which I found in later years to be very valuable because one of the great deficiencies of education that I saw was the lack of opportunity

to write, to communicate in writing, and people who write well, no matter how much they knew, there were problems in expression, and that had helped me considerably because of that background.

But high school made me become a believer, and still am a believer, in public education because that's where I met people from different backgrounds, different religious activities, persuasions, different social and economic classes, different political outlooks. And that's where I really began to first see other ideas and other people's lifestyles, which also in later years led me to believe that in certain ways I had been deprived of the opportunity of sharing the experience with people of other races, who were not in my high school. And so the high school, public education became a very important thing to me as a result of that.

STEELY: Then you go to a private school, Emory, for at least the beginning part of your college education. What made you decide to go to Emory?

E.L.: Well, first of all, my brother had gone to Emory before me. Secondly, I could live at home, and that was a cost savings. I didn't have to move off to school. I think in large measure it was as much because we didn't have the money to let me go off to another school elsewhere. I could live at home, and Emory was sort of a pretty good, small school in those days. It's much a better school, college, university today. But I think that would be the primary motivation, that it was a good college and it was less expensive. The University of Georgia, which was another option at that time, I think still would have required my having to move away, and while the tuition, of course, was much less, in those days not as much less as it is today, but I think it was cost saving, and I don't think my parents thought academically I'd get as much out of it. So I think those were the factors.

STEELY: What did you major in at Emory?

E.L.: When I first started at Emory, I was pretty certain that I did not have any intention of being a lawyer. I wasn't going there to become a lawyer. I didn't know for sure what I wanted to be. I think my parents figured that I would go to medical school, and I think I probably thought that. In fact, I know I thought that, because as a high school senior and even as



a college freshman, I associated a lot with medical, pre-medical students. I used to go down to Grady Hospital and watch operations, surgical procedures.

And I think that's probably another reason I probably went to Emory, because I had in the back of my mind that's what I wanted to do, or alternatively, be a chemist. I wanted to be a scientist. In high school, you had to write a book on your career, what careers did you select, and the two that I had selected was to be either a chemist or a forest ranger. But I'd always had the scientific orientation. In fact, one of the clubs I belonged to outside of school was called a chemical club, and we used to meet once a week and talk about science and chemistry. That was at a time, of course, when science, even more than it is today, was sort of an exciting opportunity to break into new areas. That was at a time when it was still okay—the DuPont Corporation's motto was something like, "Better living through chemistry" or something like that. Today people would think that referred to the taking of certain prohibited substances.

STEELY: [Laughs.]

E.L.: So I went to Emory. The courses I took were pre-med courses, by and large a strong scientific basis. The courses that I began to enjoy the most, although I liked chemistry and physics and math and things like that, became to be courses like history and English and philosophy and political science, so I began to move to a broader, more liberal education, educational experience.

Probably at the end of my second year, I knew that I wasn't going to go to medical school. I had the grades to do it, and in those days grades were very important. It was most competitive to get into medical school. But I decided I really didn't want to be a physician, not that I didn't think physicians did wonderful things by healing people—

[End Tape 1, Side A. Begin Tape 1, Side B.]

[Side B does not pick up immediately where Side A left off.]

E.L.: —that that was important, but if I could heal or benefit a broader number in another

way, law was something that occurred to me as an opportunity to do that, that that was more important, so I began to sort of play with the idea of law, probably around the second or third year of college. I was very active on campus in a lot of activities: fraternity, sports, again debating, again journalism. I was editor of the magazine at Emory. And again had the opportunity of beginning to meet people from different parts of a society that I had not been exposed to before.

STEELY: You graduated from Emory in '52, and you began law school in '54 at Michigan. What happened in between there?

E.L.: My last year at Emory, I had a professor of political science, who urged me to apply for something he called a Rhodes scholarship. I didn't know much about that, but he said he thought it was a pretty good thing for me to set out to do. So I figured there was nothing wrong with making a try, if he thought it was a good idea anyway, so I applied, and at the end of the various interview processes I had won a Rhodes scholarship. And even having won it, I wasn't absolutely convinced at that time that I wanted to pursue my education at Oxford. I was then dating exclusively B, who was later my wife, and you couldn't be married and go on the Rhodes scholarship. I had been admitted to Harvard Law School, and I thought that sounded like really what I wanted to do. My wife was at Agnes Scott at that time—she wasn't my wife, but we were going together. But this same professor—his name is C.H.—literally persuaded me that this is what I ought to do. So off I went for two years at Oxford.

STEELY: You went in '53. I had you down in '58.

E.L.: No, Oxford right after the fall of '52. And I decided that I didn't want to lose time by being at Oxford, so I decided to study law, read law, which made a lot of sense to me until I found out, having made that commitment, that you had to take at least one examination in Roman law in Latin and that the texts were in Latin. While I had taken two high school courses in Latin, two years in Latin, as most students used to do in those days, I was far from being fluent in the ability to read Latin in general and certainly the technical or law of Latin, so the summer before I left for England, I looked up my old high school teacher at Boys High, who

taught me Latin and who I didn't particularly like and he didn't particularly like me, and he was probably more relieved than I was when I had finished his course in Latin. I was—I don't think the word "unruly" is appropriate, but I was a hard student for teachers to work with.

Anyway, I went back. I located Mr. [R?], and we spent that summer studying Latin together, reading the works of Gaius and the works of Justinian and getting ready to go off to Oxford. It worked out, incidentally, that instead of taking just the mandatory Latin paper, Roman paper, I actually took an optional course in Roman law because I found that easier than some of the other courses.

But anyway, I went on from Emory to Oxford, and I spent two years there. It's normally a three-year course, but if you have a degree from an American university, they'll let you skip, if you will, the first year and at the end of the second year, you can take your examinations for a degree, which I did and got my degree.

STEELY: A master's of law?

E.L.: That's right.

STEELY: Then you go to Michigan. What happened to the Harvard connection?

E.L.: Two things. Number one is when I finished at Oxford and had my law degree, both Michigan and Harvard were willing to give me credit for one year, so I would enter the second year. Harvard insisted that I enter as a second-year student. Michigan said, "We'll let you pick and choose the courses, so those that you missed in the first year, that you feel you need for the second year, we will be more flexible." And so that was a factor.

The other factor was that my now-wife had transferred from Agnes Scott to the University of Michigan, and she saw the dean of the law school and said to the dean, "You really ought to make an effort to get this fellow to come to Michigan." And so he looked at my record, and they decided they would not only do that flexibility but they also provided a more generous scholarship than Harvard was providing.

My wife had been looking at schools in the Boston area, but it was certainly more convenient for her to stay and finish here education at Michigan, so those factors all combined

that I chose Michigan and enrolled there.

STEELY: But you didn't finish there.

E.L.: No.

STEELY: You ended up at Emory.

E.L.: That's right.

STEELY: What's the story on that?

E.L.: After the first year at Michigan, which I thoroughly enjoyed—B had graduated. She was graduating. I had finished ROTC at Michigan. I entered ROTC during the Korean War at Emory and had taken—because I had been in junior ROTC at Boys High School, I was able to only need two years of ROTC, so I did one at Emory before I graduated and then one at Michigan when I was in law school there. I had to fulfill my commitment once I got the commission, but I could finish law school. Barbara and I wanted to get married, and so I worked out an arrangement where I could transfer and do my last year at Emory Law School; she would teach school here in Atlanta; I would work part time at a law firm, because in those days you could take the bar before you graduated from law school.

So I took the bar, and I worked it out so that we moved back to Atlanta, got married. She taught while I went to law school and worked at this law firm. For about a year, we almost didn't see each other because when she would be getting up in the morning to go to teach, I was sleeping. When I got up and went to work or to law school—you could go to night classes as well—she had come back. So we used to just leave notes on the refrigerator door for each other for about a year.

But I came back because Emory Law School let me take night courses as well as day courses, which meant I could work, and we were able to get married, and then I went into the Air Force.

STEELY: You got through the Georgia Bar in '55. In '56 you got your J.D., and then into the Air Force.

E.L.: That's correct.

STEELY: Tell us about your experiences in the Air Force.

E.L.: I had graduated from Air Force ROTC. One of the things—you know, like people used to want to be farmers or carpenters and things like that? I always wanted to be a pilot. I used to read a lot of aviation stuff. I wasn't sure that I could be a pilot because I had a slight amount of colorblindness, and I didn't know if I could do it, but strangely enough, at the time I was going into the Air Force for active duty, they wanted lawyers more than they wanted pilots, for some reason, and so I was encouraged to do that.

But in any event, I went into the Air Force. This is an interesting story, I think, somewhat amusing. They were so interested in making these new officers happy, particularly the new lawyers happy, they said, "You tell us what part of the country you want to be in." And so my wife and I, having missed the opportunity to have been on the East Coast (New York and Philadelphia, even the Washington area, perhaps maybe even as far north as Boston) thought that would be a good place to spend two years, so we would be able to enjoy other opportunities as well.

So I checked off on the list we wanted to go to the Northeast. When I got my orders to report to active duty, they had assigned me to an air base known as [Dow?] Air Force Base in Bangor, Maine. When I suggested that's not quite what I had in mind, I was thinking more of Philadelphia and New York, they said, "Well, you said Northeast, and this is certainly Northeast." And so I spent two years in Maine. In many ways, enjoyed that. I enjoyed my Air Force experience a lot. Did not enjoy the winters in Maine a bit. I was in the Strategic Air Command, which, for the Air Force, was a more military organization than some of the other units in the Air Force, but I enjoyed that experience a great deal, although I at one point was offered an opportunity to go in February, because I remember it was, like, thirty below zero, to transfer to Guam, and I said, "Absolutely. When do we leave?" And got all ready to go, and the day before, two days before we were supposed to have the movers come, they said, "Oh, if you go to Guam, we notice you've only got eleven more months, so you'll have to sign up for another year." So I had no intention of doing that, and we stayed in Maine for the duration.

I sort of took an oath one day—in SAC they used to have these alerts at all hours of the day and night, and you'd have to come out to the base and stand by to do whatever needed to be done. One night I had a flat tire on the way to the air base, and it was, like, forty below zero with the wind chill, and I had to change that tire and get out there. I was absolutely certain they'd shoot you if you didn't show up for these SAC alerts. I took an oath that night, as people do, "Lord, if you only let me get through this, I will"—and the "I will" was I will never voluntarily live in the North again. So I survived that evening and have not voluntarily lived in the North again.

But the experience in the Air Force was a good one. I could have, in many ways—in fact, I had been at one point recruited for West Point. I am not, never was opposed to a military life. I just didn't want to have to spend all that time being a lieutenant, captain, major, lieutenant colonel. If I could have been appointed general or something like that—

STEELY: [Laughs.]

E.L.: —I think I may have made a career out of it.

STEELY: Okay!

Well, what got you involved in politics? How did you first decide to get into politics?

E.L.: As I indicated, Mel, a lot of my interest in public and community came from my family. They read a lot. My dad, I remember, every night at a quarter till eight would listen to H. V. Kaltenborn, a radio news commentator, and the dinner table, not just when they had company but even with just my brother—it was always talking about public issues and public life. I never had any idea of being involved in politics in an active way.

At Emory, I then majored in political science and became more interested in that. And at that time, the South was a great place to be because there was so much work to be done to right the wrongs and to change the path it was on. We still had a segregated society. Emory University was a segregated institution. There were people in the political science department at Emory who were outspoken, talking about the problems that needed to be rectified. It was a time in Georgia where we still had the county unit system and the urban areas, population centers

were held in thrall to the rural areas of Georgia, on a system that was totally undemocratic.

And here I was, immersed in all this injustice and had an opportunity to be part of the movement for change, so I had become very active. I remember at Emory I was a senior, I suspect, at the time, in the political science department—yes, it must have been, because the legislature under Herman Talmadge's leadership—he was then governor—didn't want to let Georgia have to vote for Harry [S] Truman, who was running for president. So what they did is they introduced a bill to change the ballot for president so that it wouldn't say at the top of the ballot, "Harry Truman," it would say, "Here are twelve electors." And they listed the electors. They had Democratic and Republican, but instead of listing presidential candidates and vice presidential candidates, as had been done historically, they just listed names of twelve electors whom nobody ever knew about.

The theory was that, number one, you didn't have to have the ignominy of having to vote for Harry Truman, who had proposed such things as the FEPC, the Fair Employment Practices Commission, and—

STEELY: Integrated the military.

E.L.: Integrated the military and had George Wallace around someplace in the Democratic Party. But you had these twelve Georgia electors in there.

Also the suggestion was made that the electors were not bound to vote for Harry Truman; they could have voted for somebody else and maybe some way could be used to bargain Truman out of office without having to vote for a Republican. They were having a hearing at the legislature on this, and I remember I was so offended by this, and most people I was associated with at Emory were so offended that I decided and they decided to send me down to the legislature to speak against this.

And so I remember very clearly going down to the legislature. They had a meeting of the Committee on the State of the Republic, chaired in the House chamber by an old-line redneck politician, arch segregationist named R.H. They were having a hearing on this, but I was able to speak against it. I explained how I thought it was an effort to deprive people of Georgia of their

sacred right to vote by saying you can't vote for president; in fact, if you vote for this list of electors, we're not even going to tell you that we're inclined to vote for the person you voted for. And I spoke against it.

And Mr. H said—he was chairman of the committee—said something to the effect that, “Why, don't you trust the leaders of Georgia to do the right thing?” My answer was, “Mr. Chairman, I wonder why it is the leaders of Georgia don't trust the people to do the right thing.” And that quotation ended up on WSB News that night, which, as far as I can remember, was the first time I had been quoted on media, and that was my first entry into politics. But it came as a result of living in the South at a time where change was just over the horizon, and it was just a fascinating time. There was an evil to be fought. So that's where my interest in politics came from, but I never thought I would personally become actively involved.

Now, what then happened is after I got out and starting practicing law—I had worked for various political candidates. I had worked for candidates. In fact, one of the first candidates I supported was a Republican, R [F?], when he was running for Congress against J.D and M.A., when he ran for Congress against J.D.. I think M actually won a popular vote victory but lost in the county unit votes that were used even in congressional elections in those days.

And so I became involved with people who were trying to change the county unit system and got involved, in a very small way, in the cases that challenged the county unit system, and had been very outspoken in the press and in other ways. I was also influenced to move into more active participation by my negative reaction, my distaste and realization of the threat posed by the McCarthy period, which was going on at that time, and I realized that here was a force that had intimidated people to be silent and be afraid to speak out, and what a threat this was to democracy and representative government. So that was part of my motivation.

In any event, after the county unit decision and shortly thereafter, the case of Baker against Carr [1962] and its progeny, calling for redistricting, the Georgia legislature was ordered to redistrict. I had sort of played around with the idea at one time of running for Congress and had talked with two other people around town that somebody needed to run against J.D. again,



not to let him have a free ride. We had a discussion one evening, and it was [C] “[nickname]” W, myself, and a person who’s now dead, [J] “[nickname]” M. We essentially decided one of us ought to do it.

We flipped a coin or matched coins, and C.W. essentially lost or won. I forget how it came out. But C.W. ran, and it was between the time he announced and the time [of] the election that the county unit system was thrown out, so Weltner was able to run in a popular election and in fact was elected to Congress. That was fine. I mean, I helped C get elected and was very close with him for many years in that regard.

About that time, I’m now back from the Air Force, and I thought that I might want to get involved in politics in the future, and so I decided, made a deliberate decision when we came back to move into DeKalb County, which I saw as being a new and growing area of younger people that would provide political opportunities if I wanted them, that would not have been provided because of the established C.W.s and others who were now in that area.

So I got back and became involved in the community. I think the first big issue that I got involved [with] in the community was opposing curbside garbage collection, if I remember correctly, which was an important lesson because I realized from the beginning that all politics is basically locally, and that is important, maybe more important to people than balancing the national budget. That was a very important lesson. Zoning issues, trash collection, solid-waste sites and things like that. I became involved in the community in that regard.

But after the Georgia legislation reapportioned and I had been so outspoken, a number of people literally—I mean, a lot of politicians say everybody came and urged me to run for public office, and that’s usually their mother or father or wife or somebody, but a number of people did suggest that, “You’ve been talking about representation for the urban areas. Now we’ve gone from three to initially sixteen for DeKalb County. Why don’t you put yourself where your mouth was?” And I thought about it, and I thought about it, and I said, *Why not go ahead and do it and get it over with?* Not really thinking that I had a great chance to win.

I was living at that time in the general area where I still do, out near Emory, and we put

together—there was a multi-member district. We used to have multi-member districts.

STEELY: Old District 77?

E.L.: This was 118 at the time. It became 77 later, when they went through it again, but it was a multi-member district, 118. I ran. You ran for posts within the district. There were four posts, posts one, two, three, four. I ran for one of the posts. There were two very well-known people running also for that post. I really didn't think I had a chance, certainly not to win without a runoff, but probably not even to win. But we ran a good campaign. I had a lot of help from a grassroots type campaign. I had been referred to a woman who had had some experience in running other campaigns, M.S., to be my campaign manager. We ran the campaign, and I shook a lot of hands and knocked on a lot of doors, and I won.

In fact, I remember very clearly the first person I ever went up to who was a stranger and said, "My name is E.L. Would you please vote for me for the state legislature?" I remember it so clearly because that was such a defining moment, to approach a total stranger on the street and say, "I am running for the Georgia legislature. Would you please vote for me?" It happened in a little shopping center out near Avondale, Georgia, called—I think it was Twin Oaks or Twin Pine Shopping Center. This gentleman was standing in front of a hardware store, if I remember, and he was so amazed that somebody came out of the blue to do that. I mean, nowadays that would be considered sort of normal. In those days, people just didn't do that. You didn't campaign for the legislature in that fashion.

I did that. I ran. I became elected to the Georgia legislature in a special election that was held in 1965.

STEELY: It was '64, but you actually were sworn in in '65, or you ran in '65?

E.L.: Let's see, that would have been—

STEELY: That wouldn't have been the November election of '64, then.

E.L.: It would have been in '65 because I was sworn in on January 10<sup>th</sup>, '66. I'd have to go back and check that, Mel. I'm just trying to think, because I served basically nine years in the Georgia legislature, and I was elected to Congress in '74 and sworn in in '75, so that would be

nine years.

STEELY: Sixty-five to '74 is what they have.

E.L.: Okay, [unintelligible]. One of the reasons that I remember my first day in the Georgia legislature so clearly—I must have been elected in '65 because January the 6<sup>th</sup>, 1966, was the day that the Georgia legislature voted on whether or not Julian Bond should be seated in the House.

STEELY: Were you a seated legislator at the time?

E.L.: No. He and I got sworn in on the same day.

STEELY: Ah.

E.L.: I remember one important event—now, keep in mind that my mother was not at all thrilled about my running for the Georgia legislature. She just didn't think that was the thing a nice young Jewish boy ought to be doing, so I had to do it without asking her permission, and she never was really comfortable with it. Of course, she was extremely proud of the fact that I had been elected, and I remember my whole family, wife, mother down there at the legislature. But it was the day that Julian Bond was being sworn in, and that whole day was devoted to the trial of Julian Bond. I had been sworn in. He had been asked to stand aside. It was almost like a regular trial. They had lawyers representing both sides. Late that evening, the vote, the first vote I ever cast as an elected official, was whether or not to seat Julian Bond. I voted to seat Julian Bond. There were two or three or four—I forget how many—white legislators who did so. But I was one of very few—

[End Tape 1, Side B.]

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