

Maureen and Mike

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**Interviewee: Mike Mansfield**  
**Interviewer: Geoffrey Sutton**  
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Geoffrey Sutton: They asked us this year to do something about you, concerning you, and what we kind of landed on doing was a look at the historical eras that were very important during your career and how you fit into those eras and kind of put a perspective on history, for not only the audience that will be at it the one evening in the Wilma Theater, but also for the school kids in Montana. We're going to try and do a...We are going to do a video presentation and make it available to the junior high students throughout the States.

Mike Mansfield: Okay; don't waste your time. It's precious, you've got a date at 10 o'clock. Start in.

GS: Are we set up?

Unidentified speaker: We are set up.

GS: We are set up. All right. Well, I guess what I'd like to do is just bring up a couple of issues and just see what you'd like to comment on about those things.

MM: Any old thing. Take them one at a time.

GS: Okay, first of all, the early years, the boyhood years and into the service very early. You started very, very early, didn't you, in the service career?

MM: Well, I was raised in Great Falls, as you know. I worked summers on the ranches. My folks ran a grocery store on the South side, 6th Avenue South and 6th Street. I used to deliver groceries to Charlie Russell. I didn't know who he was at the time, but he was living on the North side and in those days we delivered groceries by wagon, horse and wagon, and when the horse was incapacitated or wasn't available I used to deliver groceries by cart. I got to know about Russell in a different way. I had seen him, spoke to him, but didn't know anything about him until later years in a big way, but I did—I used to collect bottles and sell them to the Mint Saloon, and while I was in that profession I entered the saloon on occasions and had a chance to look at the Russell pictures on the walls and even look at some of them through a peephole machine. I didn't realize the significance of the artistry until many years later or the tremendous renown that Russell would achieve worldwide. That was one of my experiences that I always remember, and I'm delighted, incidentally, that Russell is one of the two great Montanans, along with Jeannette Rankin, who have their statues in Statuary Hall. Each state is allowed two, and the choices couldn't have been better.

Later, I ran away from home before I finished the 8th grade. I was caught the first time and put in jail overnight. The second time I got away and made it to the Northwest, where I worked in lumber camps, odd jobs. Finally I was able to bum my ride, as they said in those days, by way of various methods of transportation to New York where my father was living at the time and asked his permission if I could join the Navy. I was 14 and he said no, so I went down to the church where I had been baptized. I got hold of a copy of my birth certificate, changed it accordingly, went to the Navy recruiting station, and they took it in, I think with tongue in cheek, and that's how I began my military career. This was during the first war in February 1917, and I signed up for the duration of the war. I was in a good many months after it ended in November 1918. And I was there until August 1919, and then I came back to Montana, to Great Falls, worked in the smelter a couple of months; didn't like it. I went to Butte, worked around there for a couple of months in a dairy store got fed up with it, and joined the Army for one year, and when that was up I immediately joined the Marine Corps, and on the basis of my two year hitch in the Marine Corps, which was mostly in the Far East, the Philippines especially, China incidentally. I developed my interest in that part of the world. You want some more?

GS: And then after the service career you came back to Missoula and went to school. You met Maureen in there someplace?

MM: Yes, I came back to Great Falls. I wanted to go to high school. I hadn't finished the 8th grade. They told me I wouldn't be eligible except as a special student or I would have—until I finish the 8th grade. I thought that was too much for a grown man. I think I was 19 at the time, and I went to Butte and got a job in the mines. The first one was the Colorado mine on East Park Street, and then over the years I worked all the mines. I carried my turkey, as they said, from one mine to another, and when I quit—we had an expression, it's deep enough—I'd go to another mine, and during the course of my stay there I met Maureen Hayes, who was a teacher in the Butte High School. We began going together, and she said, "You've got to get an education."

Well, I said, "I haven't finished the 8th grade."

Well, she said "You've got to make up your high school credits some way, and I'll help you." So I started taking correspondence courses. She began tutoring me.

I went to the School of Mines, now Montana College of Science and Technology for a year in 1927 to '28. Got by just barely. I think all the professors gave me the benefit of the doubt, and they had many I'm sure. I kept on—I went back working in the mines. While I was at the School of Mines I was working five nights a week in the mines in Butte. The wages in those days were somewhere between \$4.25 and \$4.75 a day, and a couple years later the Depression really struck and my wife-to-be, the girl I was going with, said, "You've got to get down to the University." So I did, and again, as in the School of Mines, I enrolled as a special student because I couldn't become a regular student until I finished all my high school credits. They did

give me three credits on the basis of my service during the war, but I had to make up the other 12, and with her help and guidance I was able to become a regular student in the last quarter of my senior year and finished. Those were difficult years, but in order to keep me going she cashed her insurance so that we could get by.

We were married in 1932, in Missoula, and during that period also the government passed a bill giving a bonus to people who served in the war, and with those two additions I was able to finish in 1933. And so I went out looking for a job and the average pay for school teachers at that time, outside of the big cities like Butte, Great Falls, and Missoula, was about \$75 a month. I thought I had two jobs lined up. They didn't turn out as I had wished they would, went back to the University, and saw my old professor and advisor, Professor Phillips in the history department, and said "What'll I do?" Well, he said, "I don't know. There are no jobs but there's a job here as a graduate assistant, which you can have if you want. It pays \$25 a month, but during the course of it you can teach a couple of freshman classes." I said, "All right." I had no choice really, so I got my master's degree in history, heavily on the Far East because being in the Far East with the Marines had made a tremendous experience available and one which I've had my whole life.

In the same year Maureen got her master's degree in English from the university in Missoula, and I was offered a job the first year. Halftime teaching and halftime working in the registrar's office, and I took it. The next year I got on, I became an instructor, a full-time instructor, and then an assistant professor. When I came down to the University I had left a job in Butte as an assistant mining engineer, which paid around \$200 a month. When I took the assistant's job at the university I think I got \$2,000 a year, and when I left the university after nine years to go to the House of Representatives, my salary was \$2,400. It was a most pleasant period in my life. I learned a lot, made a lot of friends.

My wife urged me to go into politics. In 1940, I did. I entered the race for congressman from the Western district. I finished third in the field of three, but I started out the next day after the election to cover the district, looking two years hence. Jeannette Rankin was the one who won, not the Democrat. And I especially wanted to go to Wolf Point, a place halfway between Helena and Great Falls because I had lost Wolf Point by a vote of about 49 to 1, and I wanted to find the person who voted for me. I didn't find him or her but the story got around and didn't hurt, so with the help primarily of the miners in Butte and the smelter men in Anaconda and the students whom I had taught or become acquainted with in the university—and I think most of them were Republicans in those days, maybe they still are—I was able to squeeze in. Well, it was a little more than a squeeze. I won that time with a handsome vote, and then I served five years and five terms in the House of Representatives.

I got onto the Foreign Affairs Committee there. My interest was in the Far East. Nobody in the Congress seemed to be interested except me until the war with Japan broke out. And after five years five terms there I moved to the Senate, and I was lucky to get elected. Not too much of a majority. About 7,000, 6- or 7,000 votes, but enough to get in, and that was where I really

wanted to go, but after 24 years in the Senate we decided, my wife and I, that it was as they said in Butte, “deep enough.” Time to quit, time to retire, so we did so. That was 34 years of congressional service, and we looked forward to years of rest ahead of us, but President Carter called me and offered me a couple of ambassadorships to Mexico and other places, and we weren't interested, and finally he called and asked me if I would accept the ambassadorship to Japan.

Well I did become interested then because of my Far Eastern interest, lifetime interests. Talked it over with Maureen, and we decided we would accept it. So we went out—incidentally Carter didn't owe me anything I didn't owe him anything nothing to be paid back by either party no obligations incurred—and I went out. Carter got defeated four years later by President Reagan and when that happened I started packing because I knew the rules of the game. You're in during an administration, you're a political appointee, you turn in your resignation, which I didn't do. I just started packing and decided I would be gone by January 20, 1981, I guess it would be, and when we were about halfway through the president had come back to Washington, had not been inaugurated, the president-elect Reagan. He gave me a call and he said, “I would like you to stay on as ambassador.” Mmmm.

Well I said, “I'll have to talk it over with my wife.” And so I talked it over with her. Stayed on for the eight years of his term, and this time it was final. But it was quite an experience to serve with seven presidents, and then to serve as an ambassador under three presidents because I found out that while I retired on January 20, I did not retire until midnight of that day, and in the meantime Bush was inaugurated at noon of that day so that's where the three presidents come in. And that how now I'm working here.

GS: Any thoughts on the Kennedy era? Of course, there is a lot written about you and your relationship with John Kennedy, President Kennedy.

MM: Well he was the one president, along with Jerry Ford, that I had a very close relationship with. When Kennedy ran, Lyndon Johnson, then majority leader, ran as his running mate, and when the election was over and the Congress came back before the end of the year to discuss matters, the Democrats and the Republicans, in informal conferences no legislation, Johnson approached me and said, “Would I consider becoming majority leader?”

I was assistant majority leader for four years before that. I said, “No.” I said, “I've got enough to do representing the people of Montana.”

Pretty soon Dick Russell, the dean of the Southerners and one of the great senators, Dick Russell of Georgia, came to see me and urged me to take on the job and I said, no, I wasn't interested. Then John Kennedy called me and he said he would appreciate it as a personal favor if I would take on the job. Well, he didn't have to put in the personal favor aspect, he just had to ask, and at that time I said yes. And I stayed on the job as majority leader for 16 years and left in 1977.

Kennedy and I got along extremely well. We were in the House together, we were seatmates in the Senate. We saw things pretty much alike, we trusted each other, and we had the kind of a relationship that I think has very rarely existed between a majority leader of the Senate and a president of his own party. And incidentally, while I was in office, we had presidents of both parties as majority leader. Nixon, got along with him very well. At his request we inaugurated a series of monthly breakfast to discuss matters of importance. They developed into two and three times a month, just the two of us, once four times. And in the first seven years, the first five years of his term—before his presidency, before things really got difficult for him because of Watergate—there was only one breakfast at which one other person attended, and that was Henry Kissinger. He came in for about five minutes and then left. Nixon was very interested in reestablishing relations with the People's Republic of China. I was in full accord with his views. He said he was determined to achieve that. He felt it was very necessary for ours and the world's future, and that when he did reach an agreement he wanted me to be the first one to visit the People's Republic. I said, "No," I said, "it should be you." That as president of the United States you should be the first one to go.

Well he said, "We'll talk about that later." Then in '71, I believe, [It was 1972.] Kissinger made that trip from Pakistan to Peking, as it was called then, worked out arrangements. In February, I believe, the president went to China. In March, Hugh Scott, the Republican leader of the Senate, and I went in April, and three or four months later the leadership of the House, Carl Albert and Jerry Ford, followed. So that's the relationship. The very best with Kennedy, excellent with Ford, very good with Nixon, and very good with Johnson.

GS: Not to bring up a painful moment, as I'm sure it was, but the famous and wonderful eulogy speech [after Kennedy was assassinated], do you remember what went through your mind when you stepped up there to give that speech in that terrible time?

MM: Not really, except I was shocked for one of the few times in my life. I knew that he was going to be buried in Washington. I anticipated that along with the Speaker of the House and the Chief Justice I would be called on to make some remarks. I had been given some strong hints that that would be the case, and I spent the whole night before in writing out that speech, and I wrote it and rewrote it and rewrote it again, and finally came up with the best I could as a means of expressing my deep sense of sorrow, my sense of loss, and my sense of having to say something that would express those feelings. That's how it came out. I gave the eulogy, and I gave the copy to—went across the aisle in the Rotunda, and gave the copy to Jacqueline Kennedy.

GS: What about Vietnam? Any thoughts looking back on that?

MM: No, I was always against it. Kennedy sent me on a mission in 1962. It had been about my fifth or sixth trip to Southeast Asia. I was very friendly with Ngo Dinh Diem, the president of Vietnam, South Vietnam. I met with him again, had a chance to look the situation over, talked

to his brother, Nhu, a sort of mysterious individual, hard to define, and met with the president, Diem. I was shocked. He wasn't the same man I knew before and he parroted the same things that his brother Nhu had told me. I came to the conclusion that he had become a kind of a puppet and that Nhu, his brother, was the mastermind. And tapped other sources, wrote a report to Kennedy, gave it to him. He asked me to come down to see him at Palm Beach. He was on a boat on a place called Lake Worth, and I remember at the time that there was a lady present and her husband. Her name was Guinness, a Mexican, she was of Mexican birth. She wore a new kind of glasses, and Kennedy said, why don't we change glasses, and he took hers and she took his, and then she left. He was just there for a cup of coffee. There were a lot of people on the boat. And he read the report, and I could see his neck getting red, and when he looked up he was angry. He said, "This isn't what my people have been telling me."

I said, well, I said, "I'm sorry about that, but you asked me to go out there and give me your views on my return, and there they are and that's the best I can do." We left, I left, he was still a little put out, and about three months later he told me he had changed his mind, and that he was going to change his policy, change our policy, and that once the election—he was going to run for reelection—was out the way, he was going to begin the withdrawal of American troops. Well Dallas intervened. That was that and nothing happened except that the war accentuated, became worse and before it was over we had somewhere around 550,000 men in Vietnam. I think at that time we had about 16,000 during Kennedy's, during my time with Kennedy. We had 55,000 dead, about 300,000 wounded. It cost billions of dollars. We'll be paying for that war financially into the middle of the next century. Hospitals, pensions and whatnot coming out of it. A tragic mistake. We had no business there. It was a war I was against from the very beginning, and I hope that it taught us something, and that we'll never be caught in such a tragedy ever again.

GS: Throughout the long Senate career there was serious talk about the vice presidency at least about three times that I discovered in my reading.

MM: Yes.

GS: I'm sure the presidency came up at times and—

MM: The presidency, never.

GS: It didn't? But you chose to stay in the Senate.

MM: I'd rather be a senator than a vice president. I had no further ambitions. I had achieved what I wanted in life. Very lucky.

GS: As simple as that. Any memories of, particularly Missoula, that you may want to share with the people (unintelligible)

MM: Oh, it's a beautiful city, in a beautiful setting. And several summers while I worked in the mines I'd take the summers off and work in the forest as a firefighter when the need arose. I didn't take much time off, but I became enamored of the region, and I lived up the Rattlesnake, we lived up the Rattlesnake when we were married. We lived on East Main afterwards, we lived on the 500 block on Brooks, on the road to the Bitterroot. Before we were married I lived at a boarding house run by a Mrs. Erickson close to the University. She was a lady from Bonner, but it was a pleasant experience. I learned a lot from the students. They were not boys and girls to me when they came, even if they were the greenest freshmen; they were ladies and gentlemen. I treated them as adults. I think they appreciated it. We established a good rapport, and I am indebted to those students whom I taught, whom I met, and who I think largely supported, me whether they were Republican or Democrat, and to repeat, they were mostly Republican, I think. It was a nice way to go into Congress on a personal basis rather than being backed by an organization. And it was a relationship, which extended during my entire period, 34 years in the Congress. You could only do that in a state with as small a population as Montana where you could get to know almost everyone—but not everyone, but almost everyone and call them by their first names. Campaigns in those days were inexpensive comparatively speaking. My last campaign cost there \$87,000, and I gave all but \$20,000 of it to the state committee and the county committees, and the rest I spent on time, which I paid as campaign expenses. Now they tell me it cost a million dollars to run a campaign.

[break in audio]

GS: Who are you for in next week's Cat-Griz game? [laughs]

MM: Ah, the best team, or the better team.

GS: Spoken like a diplomat. [laughter] Speaking of—

MM: Well the records will speak for themselves.

GS: I realize this is a subject for probably several books, but a lot of children will hear this or read what you are saying. Any advice to the kids in Montana about growing up in this country? Would you for instance would you suggest political—

MM: Not any advice really maybe some thoughts. You're living in a fast-changing world. You're young enough to keep up with it. You're living in a world that is shrinking. You're becoming...shrinking, and the globe is becoming a neighborhood. It's going to shrink further still. We're going to become closer neighbors still. We're going to have to understand each other better, and we'll have to recognize that, regardless of where we come from, no matter what our color or background, that we all initially sprang from the same source. We'll have to learn to get along with one another. We'll have to be more aware of responsibilities, which go with this rapidly speeding up world, and we'll have to set examples for those who will follow us, and recognize that we don't know it all, so we should listen to the other person, and that other

person sometimes is right, sometimes we're wrong. So it'll be a matter of accommodation and compromise, knowledge and understanding. I have no doubt but that future generations will be able to cope with the events as they occur no matter how rapidly, if for no other reason than that they have no choice. And as we could cope and our predecessors could, you will cope too, and I wish you well. I hope you'll devote your efforts to preserving the environment, preserving the rights guaranteed to all under the First Amendment: freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, and freedom of the press. And I hope you will not violate any of those rights because there are limitations. You haven't been given much of a legacy, but you have been given a great challenge, and what you do will determine what your successors will be. So I wish you all good luck, and as the Orientals usually say: good health, good fortune, much happiness, and a long life.

GS: Wonderful. Thank you. Just out of curiosity, after the multifaceted career, do you prefer that people call you Mr. Ambassador or a senator or—

MM: I think we prefer—well, the vogue is in four-letter words. Mike still fits very nicely.

GS: [laughs] That is terrific. Well, I was raised in the Orient.

MM: Were you?

GS: My father founded the Asian Studies Department at Indiana University and also advised the House of Representatives and perhaps Senate on Southeast Asian affairs in the late '50s, early '60s. His name was Joseph Sutton.

MM: What was his name?

GS: Joseph Sutton.

MM: Sutton.

GS: He became president at Indiana University in the '60s.

MM: Well, I must have had some contact with him because while I was in the House nobody knew anything about East Asia, and I served on the Foreign Affairs Committee, and in the Senate, I served on the Foreign Relations Committee, so I was on those two committees in all my 34 years. In the Senate, very few people knew anything about it. There was one of my predecessors was a senator from Utah. I can't recall his name at the moment, but he had been a Mormon missionary in Japan. [Elbert D. Thomas.] He headed a Japanese history and cultural division at the University of Utah, and he was the only one in the Senate I knew, while I was in the House, who had any kind of understanding, and that was confined primarily to Japan. And he was used by this outfit that Elmer Davis, I think, headed. [The Office of War Information.] You don't even remember Elmer Davis now. The broadcasting group during the war to Japan,

he was used, because he spoke very good Japanese, to carry our message, just as the Japanese used English-speaking Japanese to speak to us over their radios. I wish I could remember his name. Thomas, Elbert Thomas of Utah. So, I must have met your father, but I don't recall it.

GS: Yes. He founded the East Asian Studies Department, which Dr. West at the Mansfield Center was there after him at Indiana.

MM: Well, I think I was...I know I was responsible for the beginnings of an East Asian department at Montana, devoted primarily in the beginning to Japan and China. It's still concentrated there. I understand they've got two Japanese professors now and two Chinese, but they're covering Korea and other parts of East Asia as well, and it's good that they are because that's where the future lies.

GS: Dr. West is teaching a Korean course now.

MM: He came from Indiana, as I recall, reading some of the catalogue.

GS: He came from the East Asian department there.

MM: Well, you got a 10 o'clock appointment.

GS: We better make plans on, when you get back to Montana—

[End of interview]