

An Oral History Interview

with

**THOMAS CHANDLER (part 3)**  
Tucson, Arizona

*conducted by*  
Julie Ferdon

July 2, 1998

The Morris K. Udall Oral History Project  
University of Arizona Library, Special Collections

© 1998

[END TAPE 1, SIDE B; BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A]

JF: We're back on the air again.

TC: Back on the air again.

JF: This is tape number 14, first side, Thomas Chandler interview.

[The year] 1976 was a pretty bad year for Mo all around. Besides losing the presidential nomination, that year he fell off the ladder, broke both arms, he contracted viral pneumonia, suffered a burst appendix, got peritonitis. Were you in touch with him at all during that time?

TC: Yes.

JF: How was he holding up?

TC: A lot better than I would. He had a lot of guts. He has a lot of guts, he's a sturdy guy.

JF: It must have been a pretty discouraging year.

TC: But he didn't quit, he didn't whine, he didn't give up. He went on about his business. And had a lot of light lines about his condition.

JF: His humor seems to have....

TC: Never left him. Never left him.

JF: In 1976, he was reelected, defeating Laird Gutterson by only 58%, and in 1978 he defeated Thomas Richey by only 54%. (TC: Yes.) Do you think the presidential race hurt him?

TC: Probably a little bit. People think, "Well, he sort of abandoned us, he didn't want to be our congressman anymore, he wanted to be president. He didn't have a chance. And what's going on here?" I think it hurt him a little bit, yes.

JF: As I recall, there were a number of people in 1976 who were kind of waiting on the sidelines in case Mo didn't run again or if he got the presidential nomination. It seemed like there was a row of people waiting for that seat. Do you remember who they were or anything about that?

TC: No. Now was that when he had the choice of either the House or the Senate, or that was later, wasn't it?

JF: I think that may have been later.

TC: Yes, that was later. No, I don't remember who they were. At that time, if you had asked me who they are, I probably could have told you, but I don't recall now.

JF: Okay. In 1976 was when he first apparently started showing the signs of Parkinson's, but he really wasn't, I guess, officially diagnosed until 1979. When and how did you learn about the Parkinson's disease?

TC: I can't tell you the timeframe. It was early on. He told me.

JF: You were probably one of the earlier people to know about it.

TC: Probably.

JF: How was he dealing with that?

TC: Well, pretty realistically. He intended to make it public at the appropriate time. He didn't intend to try to hide it. He intended to--the timing of that was another matter, and I think he wanted to be pretty sure as to what the future was before he started saying too much about it. If it was going to be bleak, he wanted to say so. If it was not going to be bleak, he wanted to say so. He wanted to have some certainty about the future before he said too much about it or made it public.

JF: Certainly about how the disease was going to affect him personally.

TC: Right. How it would affect his ability to do his job.

JF: He obviously continued doing his job. In 1982 he got involved in a redistricting fight. (TC: Yes.) My research indicated that he and a number of, quote, "Tucson Democratic associates," unquote, threatened to take the Arizona Legislature to court over the redistricting plan. Were you one of the Tucson Democratic associates?

TC: No.

JF: You weren't?

TC: No.

JF: Do you remember anything about that?

TC: Yes, in a general way, I do. But I wasn't--if they'd have got in a legal fracas, a legal battle, I probably would have had a role, maybe carrying books or something (chuckles) for the lawyers. But I wasn't active in that, no.

JF: In 1982, he was reelected again, defeating Roy Laos by 71%. So his margin started going up again. (TC: Yes.) Did the redistricting, you think, help the margin?

TC: Well, that, and his opponent.

JF: Roy Laos? What do you remember about him?

TC: Roy?

JF: Yes.

TC: A perfectly nice fellow, with virtually no credentials for the job.

JF: I notice in 1984, he ran against Lorenzo Torres [phonetic spelling] and won by 87%. He represented the People for Profit Party, so I guess the Republicans didn't even put anyone up. Were they basically conceding defeat at that point?

TC: I think so. I think they said, "He's got it now. Let's try something else."

JF: In 1984, he announced that he wasn't going to seek the presidential election again. Were you aware that he was thinking of doing....

TC: Of seeking it again? No. No.

JF: He never talked to you about that?

TC: Oh, I'm sure he said something about it to the effect that, "I've had my fling." And then his health was a problem then.

JF: So he didn't seriously entertain that, to your knowledge?

TC: I don't think so.

JF: In 1986 and 1988 he ran against Sheldon Clark and then Joseph Sweeney, winning in the high seventies. Again I'm assuming that this is, sort of, the Republicans were conceding defeat?

TC: Well, the district wasn't a garden in which a Republican should try to hoe. There wasn't anything there to hoe, for them.

JF: Were you still involved in the campaigns then?

TC: Yes. To a certain extent, yes.

JF: In 1988, Ella Udall, Mo's second wife, died in what was ruled a suicide. Did you know Ella at all?

TC: Yes, I did.

JF: Do you have any reminiscences about her?

TC: She was a very, very outgoing, sweet lady. Very supportive of Morris, and I thought a great deal of her.

JF: Did her death, or the manner of it, surprise you?

TC: Yes.

JF: How did Mo cope with that? Did you talk to him at all during that time?

TC: I talked to him. We did not spend a lot of time on that subject.

JF: In 1989, the following year, pressure seems to have been mounting for him to resign. The *Arizona Republic* ran a story asking for his resignation.

TC: Was that the first one they ran (laughs) asking him to quit?

JF: I'm not sure. I'm not sure if that's the first. I believe maybe it was.

TC: That's not the first time they--if that can be considered to be a swipe at him, it's not the first time they took a swipe at him. They did that every time they got a chance, the *Republic*.

JF: In regard to the Parkinson's, or generally?

TC: No. Just him. They found him most unsatisfactory.

JF: Throughout his tenure?

TC: Throughout his career. Yes.

JF: When, to the best of your memory, when did people start beginning to ask for his resignation or suggest that maybe it was time?

TC: About then, I think. I don't remember specifically. I can't even tell you, other than I do know that the Phoenix paper grabbed onto it. But as far as other people asking him to resign or suggesting he resign, I don't have any recollection of that occurring.

JF: Were you still sure of his abilities to stay in office?

TC: I knew he could do the job. I knew that he had his wits about him, he knew what he was doing. I was distressed about the public perception. Morris didn't look well, and he didn't function as well. He didn't have, of course, the bounce to his walk, he didn't have the quickness of movement and of speech that he'd had at one time. And to be able to communicate to the public, he wasn't doing it like he used to. And that could very well create the impression that he was losing it mentally, and he wasn't losing it mentally. And I was distressed about that.

JF: It wasn't somehow getting clear to the reading public, or to the media public, that the disease didn't affect the brain?

TC: I don't know that anyone really made an effort to do that, to carry that cross, and I understand why people would think that. I mean, he appeared to be disabled, and they equated that to old age, for example, where a person is decrepit and therefore his brain is dried up, when his problem was the disease. It didn't affect his brain; it affected his muscular ability to move and to do things. And it was very sad, for me, because here's this guy who for years was a picture of health and walked with that great spring in his step and was an athlete, and to see him wasting away physically was very hard for me. Very hard.

JF: He announced in 1990 that that would be his last election, and ran against Joseph Sweeney winning by only 66%. Joseph Sweeney has pretty much become a perennial

candidate that nobody takes seriously now. Was he at that time, or was it a matter that.... Do you think voters were sending Mo a message, or was he not able to campaign very much that year?

TC: Well, it was a combination of a lot of things. Sweeney was an empty suit. (chuckles) And probably still is. I don't know how his law school is going or what...

JF: Is that the Alexander Hamilton School of Law?

TC: Yes. (chuckles) I don't know whether his graduates are prospering and becoming lawyers and judges and professors or not. But, it was a combination of many things, and more Republicans, new people, and people saying, "Gee, it's too bad that he's still there. He isn't well and he ought to go sit in the shade, go sit on the front porch in the rocking chair and watch it pass by."

JF: Were there any members of his family that were recommending that he step down by then?

TC: I don't know.

JF: In early 1991, Mo fell down the stairs in his house and pretty seriously injured himself, and has been in the VA [Veterans Administration] nursing home, basically, since then. That April after he fell, he resigned his position in the House. Did you talk to him at all before he did that, about that decision?

TC: No.

JF: Were you able to keep touch with him after that, have any contact with him after that?

TC: No. I have not seen him, and don't intend to.

JF: I understand. Let me ask you some general questions, if I can.

TC: Okay.

JF: How did Mo's campaigns change over the years, in quality? I mean, I seem to remember early campaigns, at least early by my time, being hot dog and beer bashes, and later they seemed to go a little more toward the hundred-dollar-a-plate sort of dinners. What is your perception of how the congressional campaigns changed?

TC: The financing changed, of course, because of the cost to run a race. I don't know what the numbers were, I can't remember, but the whole political scene changed. At one time you campaigned in Pima County by going to rallies, by walking precincts. They'd have rallies all over town. You'd go and make a speech and meet people, and your people walked and you walked and you shook hands and you made speeches at service clubs.

Then it moved toward the media, toward the Madison Avenue approach. Now Morris didn't follow that trend all the way or anything like that, I'm not implying that, but the whole scene changed and shifted.

And then it got so blasted expensive, and about the only way to do it was to have an event where Robert Redford would come and people would come to look at Robert Redford. They would have given Mo twenty dollars without Robert, they'd give him a hundred with Robert. And so as a matter of necessity you had to go to those things. Morris did not like to raise money, didn't like to ask people for anything. He disliked it. But if he wanted to go back, it had to be done. And so that was a change.

And, of course, the getting the information to the public changed too, because you were using television to a certain extent and other media, rather than going out and looking at them.

JF: Which also involved a lot of money.

TC: Indeed. Very expensive.

JF: How did he change as a candidate, or did he? Did you notice any evolution there?

TC: Not really. Morris was busier, the issues were not only more complex, but there were more of them there on the plate. But not basically. Morris was Morris. He did his job pretty much the same way from Day One. He learned a lot, he got a lot better at it, but he was what he was. What you saw was what you got, and he stayed pretty much that way throughout his career.

JF: In a similar vein, what changes did you see in the Democratic Party over the years, both in the party itself and in the caliber of the representation?

TC: Well, at one time there was some party discipline. In other words, the party expected its members and people who wanted something from the party to work, to get out and get involved in party activities and to do some walking, and to put up some signs, and to go to meetings, and to stuff envelopes--whatever. Not all the help was hired then. And as time went on, for whatever reason, that changed. I saw a party that wasn't a grassroots operation. It was more of a brokered situation. And a situation where really, we're not going to look at what you've done for the party or your history in the party before we make decisions. We're going to do what we want to do right today.

The caliber of candidates? That pretty generally goes along with their chances of success. If you've got a race that a Democrat is going to win, some Democrat is going to win, you're going to have some pretty good candidates. If you've got one that's going to be a tough, tough uphill battle and very likely no chance, you've got a different type of candidate.

JF: Do you see any kind of future for the Democratic Party in Arizona?

TC: Well, I don't see a complete and quick turnaround. We've been overtaken by these Republicans everywhere you look. This county has escaped some of it, but what are you going to do in Sun City? You couldn't elect a Democrat in Sun City if Lucky Luciano was the Republican candidate. And for the party to really get back and get people who are interested, had better get off of their bottoms and go out and do something. If you're a member of a minority and you need help, you need a level playing field, you need an equal opportunity, you better not sit and wait for someone to come and hand it to you. You better get out, you better register yourself to vote, you better get out and vote, and in

the meantime, you better be out spreading the word and working for the causes you believe in. If you don't do that, if you sit there and let other people make the decisions and you say, "Well my vote doesn't count," or, "I'm busy; I've got to watch the baseball game," you ought to move into a Republican precinct with rich Republicans. They get up and vote. They're not too busy to vote. They think their vote counts. In fact, they know it does.

JF: It's really true, isn't it?

TC: They get right out of the house and parade right down there to that place and vote early.

JF: That's really true. They turn out the vote.

TC: You bet. And so, to a certain extent, it serves us right. We just sit there and let them win by default. We're not going to win all the things, we're not going to get everything we want, but we could make a bigger impact on what happens in a lot of issues--environment--a lot of issues that resonate with people pretty much across the board, if we had more participation. If I could create a perfect political world, I'd have 40% of the people in one party; 40% of the people in the other party; 20% no matter what party they belong to were going to vote the way they wanted to on election day, the way they felt they should, what they believed in, the candidate they thought was the best; 40% here would vote for Mickey Mouse if he was the candidate. And the reason I would have it that way is, I always want even Mickey Mouse to have a chance. If Mickey can go out and convince 11% of the 20% that he's the guy, he's in. So because that chance is always available, then there's going to be a contest, and there's going to be some people over in this 40%, or a candidate come out of that 40% who will try to win, so you'll get good candidates, and nobody's shut out, there's nobody that doesn't have a chance. You get a good candidate here, and a good candidate here in the two 40% segments, and then make them go to the 20%, and sell their merchandise to the 20%. You're going to come out with a pretty good result. And I'd do it that way if I was the benevolent dictator--I'd have that kind of an operation. But you've got to believe in the people, you have to believe in them--trust them and believe in them. It may take them a while to get around to the right place or the right decision, but you've got to believe that ultimately they'll do it--try to do it, at least.

JF: In just this last year, the U.S. Institute for Environmental Dispute Resolution was established in Mo's name. What are your recollections as to how Mo resolved disputes? Did you witness any occasions?--or just his approach?

TC: Well, he resolved many of them over across the street in that courthouse. He was always willing to talk about a settlement, to try to settle a dispute, resolve it in that way. But if he couldn't do that, he knew how to resolve it (chuckles), and it wasn't in mediation and it wasn't in arbitration. It was "let's conclude to the country," and the country being the jury. "Let's go over and let the jury decide this," because he knew when he did that, that he wasn't going to play second fiddle very often.

JF: How about on a personal level? Did you ever see him try to resolve a dispute between colleagues or friends?

TC: Oh, yes. As I said earlier--I hope I said it--I've never seen Morris real mad. I used to complain about him not carrying a grudge. I'd say, "You remember these jerks. Step on them when you get a chance! Be mean to them! They've treated you terribly. Don't reward them by forgiveness and compassion. Get after them!" And he couldn't do it, he wouldn't do it. I honestly can't remember anyone that he really didn't like, or said he didn't like. And I know there must have been someone out there--I know he didn't want to be around everybody in town--but he didn't carry grudges, he didn't hold those inside him. I've seen him irritated. He had great control of his emotions, and he could mediate things and was very good at getting people together and getting consensus. He did it in bar work, he did it in other areas. But when it came to him resolving a dispute, he knew where to get that job done.

JF: We've talked a lot about Mo's strengths. What would you say were his greatest weaknesses?

TC: Well, is it a weakness to not be able to punish people for past bad deeds? Is that a weakness? I don't know. Is it a weakness to say to someone who has treated you like a dog, like the dirt under their feet, and then come to you for something? Is it a weakness not to say "get out of this room before I throw you out!"? To say, "Well, you know, he's got a point," or "she's got a point. That is something." Nobody's perfect, and his "weakness" was his lack of resolve to get after people who were getting after him, and not sit around and let people walk on top of him, and then forgive them two minutes later.

He was honest--absolutely honest. He had all kinds of integrity. Is his confidence in his ability to do something a weakness? I don't think so. I don't see that as a weakness. The fact he wants to be the captain of the team, is it a weakness? It would be if he was not qualified--but I haven't seen him get after a job that he wasn't qualified to do. So I'm not very good at finding a lot of weaknesses in the guy. He was human.

JF: What kind of president do you think he would have made?

TC: Great! I think he would have been great. I really do. He had the brains, he had the courage, he had the integrity, and he could make hard decisions. He could do it if he had to do it. He could say, "This is the way it has to be." He would have been very good. He would have been an outstanding one. Measure his intellect with some of the things we've had.

JF: Yes. I think we can wrap up here. Do you have anything to add?

TC: No. Down the old road of life, you run into a lot of people. This is one you'll never forget.

JF: I think that's a very good note to end this with. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]