An Oral History Interview

with

Alan K. Simpson (part 1)

Cambridge, Massachusetts

conducted by
Julie Ferdon

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JF: This is Tape 40 of the Morris K. Udall Oral History Project. Good morning, it's Wednesday, October 20, 1999, and we're in the Harvard University office of Alan K. Simpson, former senator from Wyoming, and currently director of the Institute of Politics at the JFK School of Government at Harvard University. My name is Julie Ferdon, and I would like to welcome you, Senator, and thank you for participating in this project.

AKS: It's a great pleasure and a great honor for a great guy.

JF: Let's begin with just a brief biography. You were born in 1931 in Denver, Colorado. When did you get out to Wyoming?

AKS: Well, my mother and father lived in Cody, Wyoming. My dad practiced law there, and it was the second pregnancy for my mother. My brother was born in
Sheridan, Wyoming, the year before. So thirteen months later, she's having another, and I was apparently quite a load, because I'm six-seven now, and weigh 200, and at one time weighed 260, so I don't know quite my birth size, but anyway, my mother gained about forty or fifty pounds, and I can't remember that particular medical term for that. There's a term for that, gaining a great deal of fluid and so on. As I said, we don't think this Cody Hospital--it was a very primitive hospital in 1931--can handle what you need in case there are complications, so the Burlington Railroad ran right out of Cody, and you just went out across the depot and got on the train. There was an overnight Pullman to Denver, so her father and mother and my dad--her dad and mother--took her. It was a rather difficult birth at Mercy Hospital. We stayed in Denver two weeks at the Shirley Savoy Hotel, and we came back to Cody, where I live--that's my home.

JF: So it was sort of an accident of birth, being in Denver. Did it tie you enough to Denver for you to follow the NBA team, the Denver Nuggets?

AKS: No, but the Broncos were tied tightly to my umbilical cord later. No, but my mother often said when I got into politics, "Oh, Al, I'm so sorry that you can't say you were born in Wyoming." "Well," I said, "but you can say legally that you're a native of Wyoming, and that is what I am, a native of Wyoming." But in a jocular way, that was her, "Oh, my dear Al." I said, "Good heavens!" Anyway, wonderful mother and father, wonderful brother. So enough.

JF: You went to the University of Wyoming, and then received your law degree from the University of Wyoming also, in 1958. Is that correct?

AKS: Well, I went to Cody High School, and I was rather incorrigible and got in trouble. I was on federal probation for shooting mail boxes, which is a federal offense, and was on probation. The GIs were all coming back, and my folks thought, "God, if he gets down to the University of Wyoming with those guys that are twenty-two and twenty-three, he'll be in the pen." Well, I wouldn't have been in the pen, but maybe reform school. Anyway, so I went to Cranbrook School in Detroit for a year, and it was a wonderful experience, forced me to study. Then I went back to the University of Wyoming as a freshman and took a degree called a bachelor of science in law. It was three years of undergraduate, one year of law school, and then went to the army. Married just as I was headed for the army, still living with the same woman, a marvelous gal. And then came back from two years in the army and took the final two years of law school, and so graduated from law school in 1958, even though I took the other degree in 1954. That's how that worked.

JF: Did you play basketball for the University of Wyoming?

AKS: Yes, I was rather nominal. In high school I was captain of the team and all-conference and all that stuff. I was good. I was big--you know, six-seven, 240 pounds. That'll do you good in 1949. And we lost in the state tournament. They thought we'd be state champs and all that stuff. You don't forget those things. But I was quite a capable college football player. I weighed about 245 and played first-string defense. I was a center guard on defense. We played BYU and Utah and the big boys, and Houston.

JF: In about 1948-49, Mo was playing for the NBA team Denver Nuggets. It's a different team now. Were you aware of him at all?

AKS: Oh, sure, because when you're in high school--and I graduated in 1949--you're looking at the sports magazines--Playboy hadn't come out yet, so we
weren't aware of that--but we looked at the sports magazines, Sports Illustrated having come out. But you read those magazines, and here would be these pictures. And the one that always fascinated me was how a one-eyed guy could play basketball, and here he was, Mo Udall, with his eye from a childhood accident, I think it was--I don't remember the details.

JF: It was a childhood accident.

AKS: And how the hell he could do basketball. The key to basketball is peripheral vision, seeing. I can see this finger right here, as I look right into the wall. And all the great basketballers I ever knew had this amazing peripheral vision. And to think how a guy could do that, I thought, "That must be somethin'! That must be really.... That's somethin' special!" And of course then you would read about them, and The Denver Post was delivered in Cody, Wyoming, every afternoon. The paperboys didn't deliver The Billings Gazette from Montana. The daily paper, because it came on the Burlington Railroad, was The Denver Post. So I knew about him. Yes, you bet, I knew about him.

JF: He probably told you the story about when somebody challenged him about "how can you possibly play like that with a glass eye?" and he popped it out and handed it to the person and said, "See if you can see with this." (laughter)

AKS: I love it! I don't doubt that at all. I've heard every story--well, I haven't heard all of them.

JF: You hadn't heard that one?

AKS: They're all earthy and magnificent.

JF: It really happened.

AKS: So he handed it to the guy?

JF: I don't know that he handed it to him, because I think the guy might have been in the stands, but he held it up to him and said, "Here, you try to see with this."

AKS: (aside about the "all-seeing eye")

JF: In 1961, Mo was elected to Congress to fill the seat of his brother Stewart, who had just been made secretary of Interior by John Kennedy. In 1962, your father was elected to the Senate to become senator from Wyoming. Did your father and Mo ever run into each other at all?

AKS: Sure, because of a common theme, humor. My dad, magnificent humorist. So he went to the Senate and I was his campaign manager and went back with him--not to work, because you could then in those days hire your son or your wife on your staff, and there was nothing wrong with that. And Dad and I knew there would be a hell of a lot wrong with that, but I remember Dad knew him. And then, of course, Dad was on the Interior Committee, so he got to know Stewart well, because he was always testifying before Scoop Jackson's committee. Scoop was chairman of Interior. So Dad knew Stew. In fact, Stew asked about me just last week, and the word came back. I don't know where it was, "Say hello to Al--Stew Udall." So Dad knew Mo, because he would say, "God, I saw Udall, and he told me a hell of a story." And that's what they did, they loved to tell stories. I don't know how well he knew him.
JF: Was that with Mo that he would tell stories?

AKS: Yes. He thought Stewart was a little bit quite reserved, much reserved, compared to Mo.

JF: More serious and reserved than Mo?

AKS: Much, much.

JF: Yes, that's true. Well, from 1965 to 1977, you were in the Wyoming State House, House of Representatives. During that time, in 1974, Mo declared his candidacy for the Democratic nomination for president, and ran for two solid years until 1976. Do you remember him running? I know your focus is more on the Republican side of things, but given the connection with your father and all, I wondered if you had followed that campaign at all?

AKS: Only as a basketballer, only as a guy who wondered about the guy with one eye who played professional or AAU basketball.

JF: And was running for president.

AKS: Yes. And the articles always talked about, you know, this man who was a basketballer with one eye. And of course I remember this from The Denver Post and the Nuggets and my high school reading. I didn't really care much then about presidential politics. I was in the state legislature, very busy, but I was kind of hoping this guy would win, and he damned near did. People don't realize how close he came. I think with a switch of 75,000 or 100,000 votes in certain primaries, that he would have beaten Carter. No one dreamed that he would beat out--well, there was five or six of them in the race. McCarthy, wasn't it?

JF: It was McCarthy. It was Frank Church, Birch Bayh.

AKS: Birch Bayh, yes, and he beat all of them.

JF: Fred Harris, Sargent Shriver.

AKS: He beat them all, if I recall--everybody but Carter, wasn't he, in the whole total?

JF: Scoop Jackson was also there, and Wallace, on the more conservative side. But he certainly beat out all the other liberals.

In 1978, you ran for United States Senate. After arriving in Washington, do you recall at all the first time you met Mo?

AKS: Just walking the halls of Congress. I don't think he knew me, but House members tend to know the senators that come in, because there's only, you know, a few of them come in every year. In that class there were twenty of us elected to the Senate--the largest class in the history of the Senate, one-fifth of the Senate: Bradley [Bill], Cohen [William S.], Kassebaum [Nancy], Heflin [Howell], Pyor [David], Cochran [Thad]--a great, great bunch--Levin [Karl]. And we had a lot of fun together. And so it wasn't several months before I ran across him, because he already had a reputation. If you really wanted to work with somebody, you didn't have to worry about raw partisanship and all the crap that goes with it, then search out old Mo Udall. Well, it was easy to search, because they put me on the Environment and Public Works Committee. Howard Baker was our leader.
I was on the Nuclear Regulation Subcommittee with Gary Hart as chairman. Mo, of course, was the head guy over in the House with regard to that issue. So I'm on a conference committee.... But we had met long before that. I guess we saw each other within a few weeks after I was sworn in.

JF: You mentioned in your eulogy at Mo's memorial in Washington, D.C., in January, when you'd come to Washington, Mo had taken you under his wing.

AKS: I did.

JF: I wondered if you could elaborate on that some.

AKS: Well, he knew my father, and he knew his brother knew my father, and he knew, too, that Barry Goldwater, who was a friend—they were friends, good friends, Mo and Barry—and my father and mother lived in Arizona, so Mo knew that. I think the first time he came up, he said, "How are your folks? Do they like Arizona?" "Yeah, they do." "Well," he said, "I know they're there...." I don't know what district he was from.

JF: He was in the Second District, which only included parts of Phoenix much later in his career.

AKS: Anyway, he'd ask about the folks, and then we'd just tell stories. He would ask me, I'd see him at the State of the Union [Address] or something and [he'd] say, "How are you doin'? Are they raggin' you around? You're in the minority"—so I was in the minority until 1980, so the first two years. I said, "No, I've been treated right. Hart's treated me right, and Byrd, and doin' all right over here." He said, "Well, none of us over here know what the minority is. So it'll be interesting to hear your thoughts on it," because the Republicans hadn't been in the majority then for twenty years, and then finally forty, or whatever it finally ended up. And then he knew that this was my issue that I'd been pressed into, which was nuclear regulation. And then in March of 1979, I'd just been there a few weeks and Three Mile Island happened. He came by, and here I am as ranking member, and he said, "How you doin', cowboy? You got a full plate." Well, he did too. And then don't forget Babbitt was appointed on the special commission to investigate the special circumstances of Three Mile Island.

JF: Oh, I'd forgotten that.

AKS: Yes. Okay, so here was Bruce—that's where I met Bruce—and he did a hell of a good job on that. In fact, that commission report you could read today and it'd be balanced and thoughtful. Hart and I did one. I don't think Mo's committee really did one. And what was Mo's committee, the full title of his subcommittee was what?

JF: Of the subcommittee, I'm not sure.

AKS: Well, it had to do with—the full committee was called Interior of the House? And then they changed it now to Resources or something.

JF: House Interior Committee when he had it.

AKS: But he was chairman of the House Interior Committee, so he didn't have a subcommittee on nuclear.

JF: I wasn't aware ____________.
AKS: So he took that under his own wing. Well, anyway, he was involved in energy issues, and also involved in radionuclides and radon--these things--and uranium, because of production and so on. Anyway, I don't remember the names of committees. All I remember [is] that we were thrown together, and then of course as we both had this reputation for humor, people would ask us to both come to some kind of an event together, to emcee the evening. Some senator or congressman would say, "Would you and Udall come to lunch?" I think Markey [Edward J.] asked us once, "Will you and Mo do my seminar for my people coming here?" So we worked up a little shtick and drove them crazy. And then we'd go down to a fund raiser and tell our usual stories. We'd say, "God, Mo's great (unclear)." If they didn't laugh and said, "You need some new stories," he, said, "Hell, I need a new audience, is all I need," or something to that effect. Anyway, it was a very easy thing, because when you have a great sense of humor, and you're in the ruggedness of politics and the barbaric parts of it, you just kind of seek out somebody to tell a crappy story to, and laugh. And nobody could tell crappier stories than Mo Udall and Al Simpson. I'd call him on the phone occasionally, or he'd call me and say, "I got a good one for you." Usually outrageous. And that was it, for laughter. And then his book came out. I don't know when that was.

JF: Too Funny to be President.

AKS: Eighty-four?

JF: I was going to say 1984. Let's see if I have it here. [1988]

AKS: Well, anyway, we worked together. Without going into war stories, I'll never forget the day--it was a testy conference, bright staff all around, something on, I don't know, nuclear something about something--very controversial. We were in Baker's office, having the conference committee, because Baker was damned tired that we hadn't settled this conference issue, and Mo was the chairman of the House and I was chairman of the Senate. Finally, after--you know, Mo and I would always start the conference with a joke. We'd each tell a story, and they'd say, "Hurry, up, we gotta move on!" We'd say, "Well, I want to tell you the one about the guy out on the edge of the river," and [they'd] say, "Oh, my God." We didn't give a damn, we'd just tell it anyway. But finally we shook hands and settled this issue, and there were groans among the staff, because Mo and I had just decided to quit the bullshit and just settle it. The issues were minuscule on the other side, and we just got up and shook hands, said, "That's it." All the members, congressional, they said, "Great, great!" And I'll never forget, Mo looked around the room, he said, "Any one of you staff people here have a problem with anything we've done? Any moaning? Groaning? Bitching?" Well, of course half of them were just in shock. Their favorite issue had been sold down the river, they'd lost their favorite part. He said, "I just want you to speak now. Speak now, because hereafter there'll be nothing you want to hear. I want to hear everything we did right here in the final product, no changes, no nothing, no sighing, no gasping." God Almighty it was fun! And the staff was just in shock. One guy raised his hand, "Mr. Chairman?" "Yes? Yes, what is it?" "Well, I don't think you can do...." He said, "Well, we've already done that, so what's your next question?" It was marvelous, it was a delight.

That was the way he did his work--fair. There wouldn't have been a soul in the Congress that ever knew him that didn't say he was just exquisitely fair--and kind--and tough. And underneath, you know, all humor is serious. Those of us who know humor in its highest form, all humor is serious, and all humor comes
from pain. Show me a guy who's a man of great good humor, and I'll show you a person that's been through some very painful times. The people who've never been through painful times have no sense of humor, and nothing to ground it on.

JF: That's an interesting observance.

AKS: Look at Bob Dole, who sat in a dark room for about 120 days. Look at Mo Udall, with his eye out. Don't feel sorry for me, but I weighed 185 when I was a seventh grader. I was called a lard-ass and a fatso, and a pimple-faced goon, and that's where you learn humor. You have two choices: go home and suck your thumb, or get funny to take the heat off of your own self pity.

JF: On that theory, John McCain should be hilarious.

AKS: John McCain has a good sense of humor.

JF: Actually, he does.

AKS: See? He does. But it's a wry, biting....

JF: You don't see it much in public.

AKS: Yes, but you see it, and it's quick, and it's sharp, but it's humor, and it comes quickly. But anyway....

JF: A number of people, environmentalists, have sometimes faulted Mo as compromising too much. What was your opinion about that?

AKS: Well, Mo was as uncomfortable as I was with the hundred-percenters. You show me a hundred-percenter, and that's the guy I want to stay away from. And I watched that all during my life in the Environment and Public Works Committee. Finally, you know, we would do the Clean Air Act in the Senate Committee, and they'd say, "Oh, well, let's get this language in there, and toughen it up, and by God, let the coal miners in," they're going to have Knox [Creek Coal Corp.?] and SO-2. And I said, "Do you think you're gonna get that past Robert Byrd of West Virginia?! He's in your party. I'm not in the majority. You think Robert Byrd, with an entire state dependent upon the coal industry is going to swallow that pile of crap?! Get serious!" They said, "Senator, you are one of the seven soot-covered slobs in the U.S. Senate." I said, "Well, publish whatever you want, but I'd like to do a bill that we could pass. I didn't come here to watch a bunch of hundred-percenters ask for total purity and pretend you could get it!" God, they'd get mad. So then I learned the easy way: I'd vote for the bill. It'd be just the greenie bill of all time--you know, I mean everything in America would shut down, and there would be a rose-covered monument on every factory in America. And I just voted for it. They would say, "You sonofabitch, what are you doing?!" I said, "Good bill! Hell, I loved it!" and knew that Byrd would be the one that'd take the heat. (chuckles) I just said, "To hell with it." Mo said, "I see you voted for that turkey." I said, "I got tired of gettin' beat up. I've thrown off...." The poor opposition doesn't know what to think, and then they get mad because Simpson has joined the greenies. I don't join either side. I just said, "Look, you gotta have quality growth on our terms." The best human right is a job. You talk about human rights, and all this crap into the atmosphere. The best human right is a job. Then you're productive, you've got self-esteem. So I said, "Let's see if we can't do this in a way where we don't befall...." I said, "I come from Wyoming. You think Wyoming's okay?" "Oh, I love Wyoming." "Well, how the hell do you think it looks like that, for chrissakes? Five generations of my family have
been workin' on the laws to make it look like that. So don't give me your paternalistic crap." Old Mo liked that, but he couldn't always say that, but he liked that tone. And he'd kind of come over and jab me and say, (in a whisper) "God, I liked that! I couldn't quite say that in my situation." And he couldn't, because he had guys on his committee who were extremists on both sides. Anyway, [inaudible] all over the place on that.

But during the Clean Air Act, I'll never forget the nine environmental groups met. They were out in the hallway one night at two o'clock, and here we are, George Mitchell, working like a dog; Moynihan; myself, Byrd; all of us working conscientiously--Chafee [John]. And the greenies are all out in the hall. I said, "What are you guys cooking out there tonight?" And they said, "Trying to figure out how to make Chafee and George Mitchell pay for getting this bill, compromising to get this bill." I said, "So you're gonna go punish George Mitchell and John Chafee, two guys who hauled more water for you than Gunga Din?! You guys are stupid and greedy and bone-headed!" Well, at that they all hissed and grunted and jumped up and threw fingers. But that's the way Mo did his work, too. He knew how to compromise an issue without compromising himself--how to get a crumb when he couldn't get a loaf. And he was good at it, and he was a good legislator. When things would get hot, he'd get cool. And when things were too cool, he'd get hot! He could go both ways.

JF: How did he--and you, for that matter--use your sense of humor in the legislative context?

AKS: Well, humor is the universal solvent against the abrasive elements of life, as my mother said. Humor would just kind of diffuse a situation, and Mo would just say.... And of course I was his foil, and he was mine. Things would get hot and he'd say, "Simpson, before this guy hits the other one over there, do you remember the story about the preacher or so-and-so?" And I'd say, "No, Mr. Chairman, tell us that." And he'd kick his head back and tell some outrageous story. And then I'd ask him one. The other members of Congress picked that up. And then they would equate us together, which was always very pleasant to me, I loved to be associated with him. And we would, as I say, do little skits together, downtown on "K" Street. And in his book, he talks about me and how I took a difficult issue of immigration, and how through the use of humor got a bill, and how I used that as a legislative tool. That was a beautiful tribute. I have that book, with a beautiful inscription in it. And the envelope it came in, "Here, you big skinny bastard. Love, Mo." I've kept all his notes. If you've seen George Bush's new book called All the Best, the notes he wrote to others, and notes people wrote to him--puts a whole new light on George Bush.

JF: Oh, is that right?

AKS: Oh, it's a beautiful thing.

JF: The one that just came out?

AKS: Yes, it's called All the Best.

JF: I've seen it in the bookstores.

AKS: Yes. Well, it's letters from George, and people writing to George: limericks, jokes, Bush saying, "This guy drives my ass crazy." People didn't see that side of George Bush. If they had, they would have been more drawn to him, as those of us who knew him so well knew him and loved him.
Anyway, Mo, that in the book, I really was quite charmed by that. And we just loved the guy, he was very special.

JF: He was known not only for his humor, but also for his sense of, and practice of, decency and civility and humility. Was that your experience with Mo pretty much?

AKS: Oh, yes. And I don't know anything about his marriages, but I knew that Norma seemed to give him great pleasure. I didn't know the other wife. I've met those kids, they're wonderful children. And the nephews and nieces. And I don't know the domestic parts of that, but divorce is always somewhat bitter. I never heard him talk about anybody, pull you aside and say, "This guy is a real horse's ass, Al--a real horse's ass." I would tend to call him and say, "I'm gonna tell you, Mo, that guy on your committee is a pure horse's ass." "I know, Al, but I gotta live with him, and you don't, so don't pick on him, and don't drive him crazy, and don't get impatient, and don't get testy and snappy." I said, "Oh-kay." And then I'd start to do that, and he'd say, "Al, unt-unt-uh, unt-uh!" So he knew--he got to know me, and he was a good influence. But we worked together on a lot of common issues.

JF: I'm curious, on the nuclear power issue. I know in your subcommittee you dealt some with nuclear waste issues, and I'm just curious if you ever, in that capacity, ran across Mo's nephew, Tom Udall, who was attorney general in New Mexico, which was one of the favored sites for nuclear waste storage.

AKS: Never knew Tom until I went out to address some group, and Tom was in the room. He was running for his office that he attained here, so I really never knew Tom at all. And of course Mark, the congressman from the Boulder area.

JF: Tom is Stewart's son, and Mark is Mo's son.

AKS: That's right, they're cousins. I knew that, but I knew Mark through the context with Mo and not--I didn't really know Tom, nor did I know he was involved in anything I remember regarding nuclear waste.

JF: In 1997, you wrote a book entitled Right in the old Gazoo. It was less than complimentary about the press, and yet the press, especially in 1976 when he was running for president, was always very kind to Mo, and always seemed to like Mo. To what would you attribute that?

AKS: Well, I attribute it to the way I've lived, too--they liked me, they treated me.... I mean, I wrote the book about the lifetime of scrapping with the press, but I was always invited back. I did all the shows, I did Koppel innumerable times, and Jim Lehrer and "Meet the Press" and all the rest of them. I did those. Even when I was whacking on them, I always had a rule that when they're after your butt, answer the phone. So I was always accessible, Mo was always accessible. And this is not a bitter book about the press, it's about the jerks in the press. And there's many jerks in the press, as there are jerks in Congress. When I was writing the book, I'd have responsible journalists say, "We're very disturbed. Why are you writing a book about the press?" I said, "Why? What the hell do you care?" They'd say, "I wonder what you'd do to curb or limit or restrict us." I said, "I haven't the slightest desire to curb or limit or restrict you, I just want to stick it in your ear." (chuckles) I said, "It's called the First Amendment! You wouldn't want to deprive me...." "Oh, yes! Well, no, we wouldn't.... Of course I didn't mean it that way!" Jesus. The most thin-skinned group in society are journalists. You can't find their skin with an epidermal electron microscope. And they accuse us of being thin-
skinned! Holy cripes! Anyway, the book was fun, and as Dave Broder, who read it—and Gergin [David] reviewed it—it was reviewed, it sold about 30,000 copies—I haven't received any royalties yet. But they said, "Simpson, you ornery bastard"—and Mo loved the word "bastard." I loved that when he said, "The voters have spoken—the bastards"—when he lost. He said, "The voters have spoken. (pause) The bastards!" It was great. Anyway, David Broder said, "You know, Simpson, that book is outrageous, but 60% of it is true. That's coming from a journalist." And I respect Dave Broder more than.... And I knew them, as I say, I'm not dropping names, but they're wonderful people.

So anyway, I did the book and had fun doing it. It's full of stories and anecdotes. And sure, the thin-skinned of the fourth estate don't like it, and wouldn't, but it wasn't directed at the good ones.

JF: As westerners, I'm sure both you and Mo had strong feelings about public land management issues. Did you and Mo differ on public lands issues at all?

AKS: Sure, we did. You know, I come from—you know 44% of the nation's wilderness in the lower forty-eight is in Wyoming—forty-four percent of the nation's wilderness. I'm leaving off Alaska. And continually the Senate and House committees were asking Wyoming to produce more wilderness, which means closing it off to every other use. And finally we said, "You know, I think we ought to have a wilderness park in the center of Phoenix or something. I mean, we need to have one in Cleveland for you, Metzenbaum [Howard]. You need a wilderness area outside of Cleveland. If you people are just trying to lock us up, just remember that we have Yellowstone Park, which is untouchable, and should be forever. We have Grand Teton National Park, which is untouchable, and should be forever. We have Shoshone National Forest, and the Medicine Bow National Forest, and the Snowy Range National Forest, and those are practically untouchable, except you have multiple use. So why don't you find new work somewhere, and hustle your ass off somewhere else to pick up the next batch of wilderness so the rest of us can eat, and raise cattle and sheep, and do things that send their kids off to the University of Wyoming, and just kind of lay off." Well, you know, you don't get very far with the staff. The staff of the Interior Committee of the House would go to Wyoming and drink and screw and get out of their sleeping bags and look into the east and say, "We should preserve this too." And then they come back and just stick new language together to add more wilderness, all cut out of Wyoming, not out of Utah or Montana, but out of us. That got damned tiresome to me. And Mo would hear that. He'd say, "I heard that." And I said, "Well, who are the staff members cookin' this up?"

There was a staff member for a wonderful congressman named John Seiberling. That guy was a zealot. Not John—John was a good egg. I mean, we didn't agree either, on anything, but the staff member was a zealot. That's one who, having forgotten his purpose, redoubles his efforts. And he was insistent. And he'd keep cooking stuff. We'd look at a map, we'd say, "Where the hell did this come from?!" Well, can't even remember his name. Boy, he was probably married to a tree and living somewhere on a mountaintop smoking hemp somewhere. But anyway.... Andy something. Well, enough of that.

And you can go punish the cowboys all you want about grazing on the public lands. When are we going to get these Cadillac cowboys? I said, "Why don't you go see them? I mean, these are guys out in Worland, Wyoming, that've got thirty head of cows and their house looks like the Grapes of Wrath, for godsakes." "I don't believe that." I said, "Well, go see it, go look." And then I said, "And I've gotta sit here and take all the bitchin' from you guys about sixty million bucks goin' to grazing fees, while I gotta give the corn guys 5.2 billion?! and
the wheat guys 2.6 billion?! And you're bitchin' about 60 million?! Get outta here!" But I'd say if you're going to punish these cowboys a little more, you know what they'll do? They'll go down to the county commissioner and go to the zoning and planning and commission and say, "Ed, I can't make it anymore, so I'm just gonna subdivide this area. Instead of havin' cows poopin' on the prairie, you'll have septic tanks. So pick your poison. You want people poopin' all over the prairie, or cows? You name it." Mo could hear that. Others couldn't, but he would.

JF: That's a choice westerners really will have had to make.

AKS: Well, sure! I mean, look at Denver. Look at these places. I mean, it looks like legions of ants crawling across the horizon. Look at Bell Road. Thirty years ago, that was out in the desert. Anyway....

JF: Phoenix is a good example. What about the Alaska Lands Bill? In 1980, the Alaska Lands Bill was sponsored by Mo, was signed into law by President Carter. Did you support that bill?

AKS: Yes, we were in the majority then. I don't know.... What did it pass the Senate by?

JF: I don't remember the votes that it passed by.

AKS: It was big, I think.

JF: It took a number of years to get it through.

AKS: Well, any bill that's worthwhile takes eight to ten years.

JF: I think this took exactly eight.

AKS: Well, I think when it finally came over--because we were in the majority in 1980, we took over the Senate. So if it passed in 1980, it was a Democrat-controlled Senate.

JF: I believe it passed in 1980, and it was signed by Carter. In fact, that was part of the push to get it through, was to make sure it did get signed.

AKS: I couldn't tell you how I voted, but I bet you ten bucks and hold the stakes in my mouth, that it was the way Ted Stevens of Alaska and the other senator, were ready to vote. Because I felt how can a U.S. Congress come in and do that if the state didn't agree? Even Mo wouldn't like that one, if they passed a bill that he didn't like in Arizona and passed it and stuffed it right in his ear. I don't remember what happened, but I bet my vote matched the senators from Alaska.

JF: He did say the last time that he was in Alaska they waved at him with all five fingers.

AKS: (chuckles) That's right, because it had worked out pretty well.

JF: Over the course of your friendship, do you think that Mo had an impact on, or an influence on your view on environmental issues?

AKS: No, not really. But he had a gentleness, and of course my old man was always slugging it out with Stewart. So when I got there, Pop said, "God
Almighty, watch out." He wasn't there then, was he? No. Was Stewart there in 1979?

JF: No, he left in 1961.

AKS: Sixty-one?! Well, he went in, in 1961.

JF: He went in in 1954. I'm sorry, you mean....

AKS: Stewart.

JF: Secretary of Interior. I was thinking Congress.

AKS: Secretary of Interior.

JF: He was there through Johnson. Yes, I think he was there until....

AKS: He was there my whole time with my dad. Dad was there 1962 to 1966. So anyway, he wasn't there when I was there. No, I knew Mo to be a dedicated person who believed in the preservation, he believed in wilderness. And don't forget, Wyoming was one of the few states that passed a wilderness bill in the early eighties, because we had a Democratic governor, Ed Hershler and Dick Cheney and myself and Malcolm Wallop. We got together and did a bill and had it signed, and hell, the other states were still struggling. So Mo knew that I was not trying to do anything, and I knew that he had powerful engines driving him. He really had a constituency who demanded 100% of him on environmental issues, and he gave them an honest 90 or 85, because he just wouldn't join them on all their poppycock--and some of it is pure stuff.

But I guess the influence that Mo had on my life was how to do things with fairness and patience and kindness and with good humor. And it didn't matter how knotty or puzzling the prospect or the issue was, that's what he taught me.

JF: Mo was officially diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in, I believe, 1978. A number of people felt like they'd seen it before. You came to the Senate around 1978. When did you first become aware that he had this disease?

AKS: Immediately. Maybe that's what made me gravitate toward him, because my father had Parkinson's, and got it when he was sixty-two. How old would Mo have been at that time? But Dad got Parkinson's at....

JF: [Mo] must have been in his mid-fifties, I think.

AKS: Dad had Parkinson's, and he was of the age of sixty-two, sixty-three. It started with a shake of the left hand, and then the mask expression began to take place. And then the voice begins to diminish. So when I saw Mo, I didn't recognize those symptoms at first, but having a dad who I loved dearly, and watched the disease affect, I knew that something was up. And then, of course, the worst part for Mo was that it moved fast then. And you never know how fast or slow it's going to move. Dad went into voice therapy and had to bring his voice back, and did. But Dad lived to be ninety-five, and quality years, except for the last five or six. And the last five or six were just like Mo's, just laying there. But you never know what's going on in the gear shift in there, and my brother and I would go in, and Pop only had one eye.

JF: I didn't realize that.
AKS: He lost an eye twenty-five years ago. We'd say, "Hey, Pop, listen to this...."