NU: Where are we?

JF: Let’s see, we’re on Tape 53, Side A. This is the second tape in the Norma Udall [interview]. I wanted to ask you about the reception held after Mo’s retirement. Was it in the Capitol, or was it in one of the House office buildings?

NU: It was in a House office building. And there was a little blurb about it in the paper, and that’s how George Bush heard about it, and just invited himself, came with the Secret Service.

JF: And he just showed up?

NU: And he stayed. And he was all excited because there were a lot of pictures around that they had taken out of the files, and one of them was a picture of the baseball team—the House baseball team—and he said, “That’s me! There I am with Mo!” He was great. He stayed and talked to everybody in the room.

JF: What was his relationship with Mo?

NU: They knew each other in the House. I don’t think Mo felt overly thrilled about him, but those days, too, he was a little more moderate. You remember, he was a pro-choice moderate. But I remember one nice thing: When Mo and I—I keep going back in time—when we were going places together when we were married, we did have some wonderful times, such fun. But he was sick then. We went to the White House picnic, which is for cabinet members and members of Congress—both parties—and Senate—and it’s just very informal, everybody wears jeans and all that. And we came there, and there were two lines on the lawn—there were two long lines, one at either end. One was Barbara, people coming up and shaking hands with her. And one was George at the other end. Then they would get their picture taken, as they were shaking hands. And there’s this long line at either end. And so we came along the side. We were talking to the Scheuers. Emily Scheuer went over to Barbara Bush and she pointed over to Mo. She nudged Barbara, and Barbara stopped, left her line, and said, “(gasp) Mo!” And she hugged him and she took hold of his arm, and took hold of me with the other arm, and marched us both across the grass, all the way across the grass, and there was George with the line, and she stopped, and she said, “George, look who’s here!” And he left his line and came over and greeted Mo. It was really a very sweet.

JF: So they must have had sort of a special regard for each other.

NU: I don’t think Mo had a lot of affection for George. He didn’t dislike him, but I don’t think that he was somebody who was one of his special people. I think he was just sort of indifferent about him.

JF: But Bush himself must have felt pretty special about Mo to have come to his retirement party.
NU: That’s right. And we were thrilled. I have so many pictures.

JF: Well, how was your life then? This must have been a very difficult time for you, because he was in the nursing home, and couldn’t talk at that point, could he?

NU: No. But in the beginning, he could eat food, he could hold a cup, and he could eat things with his fingers, but I used to come and feed him. I came every day, and I’d sit there with him, three, four hours sometimes. And I would feed him, help him to eat more efficiently. And I’d bring him goodies. I’d bring him ice cream and cookies. He loved cookies, I always had cookies in the closet there. And he loved ice cream. I got to know all the nurses, and I watched carefully to make sure that he was not—that everything was right, that things were being done properly. Got to know all the doctors. And I was there maybe five out of six days a week. And one day the doctors called me aside and said, “You’ve got to stop this. It’s too much.” I’d sit there, and if he fell asleep, I’d read, and then he’d wake up, and we’d talk. And I’d just chatter away and try to use a lot of names of people. Sometimes I would try to use the name of somebody maybe who he couldn’t stand. I would mention someone who he really didn’t like, to try to get a rise out of him. Then he’d kind of get a twinkle in his eye. You know, we were talking, even though he wasn’t. And we’d watch TV movies together. I don’t think he really focused on them, but we’d be together, and I was always sitting there and holding his hand, and petting him. I was always petting him. But they said, “You’ve got to stop coming here this often, or you’re going to burn out. You have to start taking trips. Go out of the country, take a tour, go away for a weekend. Do it continually, periodically.” So then I took a trip. I used to take trips about every few months.

JF: Where’d you go?

NU: Oh, I went with the local—the first trips I took were with the local college history department, and we went to Greece. It was wonderful. You take classes first.

JF: Oh, sounds wonderful!

NU: Yeah, you take classes and learn all about the country and the history, and then you go. Before that, you go to the museum to look at their art. It was fabulous, it was wonderful. Then I took a number of different trips to different countries, and enjoyed them. I remember Mo said when we were married, “The first thing we’re going to do is I’m going to show you Alaska.” And we had a trip planned, but he was too sick.

JF: Oh, that’s too bad.

NU: And he never did. So you know what I did, I went to Alaska.

JF: Oh, good!

NU: And I mentioned my name, and wherever I went, even in the artists’ shops, I’d say the name Udall, and “(gasp)” and they’d hug me. It was wonderful. I went to China with
that same group—a very interesting trip to China. Went to England. I would take a trip about twice a year.

JF: And did you ever get the feeling Mo even really knew you were gone?

NU: They said he didn’t. They said time didn’t matter to him. But I’d be calling them from overseas. So twice a year I would take a big trip, and then I took an elder hostel, I went to Nepal on a trek. But this is over a period of years. But basically I was there. And they said, “Don’t come every day now!” So I went three times a week, and they said that’s healthier. So then I got more involved and started taking classes and doing things like that, that I couldn’t do when I was going there every day.

JF: Well, you had a life too.

NU: Yeah. Well, they said, “If you burn out, that’s worse, we’ll have two patients.” And his doctor remains a very dear friend—his doctor from NIH, Dr. Chase. Have you talked to him?

JF: No, I haven’t talked to him.

NU: You should talk to Tom Chase. He and Mo used to sit and tell jokes together.

JF: That’s a good idea—very good idea.

NU: And he was always better. As soon as he got there, he’d be better.

JF: Of course!

NU: “Well, how are you, Mo?” “Oh, can’t complain.” “Any problems?” “No.” And I’d say, “Yes! Yes!”

JF: That’s the rule when you go to a doctor, though, you feel great by the time you get there.

NU: It stops hurting when you go to the dentist.

JF: Exactly.

NU: He’s a wonderful man, and he’s a very fine doctor. He has a fabulous reputation.

JF: Mo was in the nursing home how long?

NU: Total time that he was in the hospital, including when he was first—when he first fell, he was in a regular hospital, and then they sent him to NIH for a couple of weeks. So that first month he was in other hospitals, but after that, he went to the V.A., which was wonderful. I figured out with Elma today, it was nine years, not eight—because it
was from January ’91 to December ’98. And they were so kind to him. They just loved him. He had a private room in the back. They didn’t put his name outside on the plate, and he had good privacy.

JF: In the end of those years, say, Year 7, 8, 9, I imagine the visitors had trickled off quite a bit.

NU: Yes, they did.

JF: Who remained regular visitors?

NU: I’m not talking about family, because I know Anne used to come up. I know John McCain continued coming. And Dennis DeConcini. I know he wasn’t getting as many, but there would be people who would just, like, be in town: his friend Dr. Jerry Targovnik, he would always go up when he was in town, and visit Mo. Just different people. Bill Hungate [phonetic] came into town, and he would go visit. So there would be occasional visitors. But you’re talking about regularity—it was erratic. Cliff Robertson would be regular if he was in town.

JF: And McCain remained regular, and DeConcini.

NU: DeConcini, yeah. And of course the DeConcinis split, had a divorce, and Dennis used to continue coming. I just know there were others, and [unclear]. I’ll think of them later. (laughs)

JF: Did you get the sense that Mo was aware of those visits?

NU: Toward the end, you never knew. The last couple of months it was hard to know. The last few months they fed him with intravenous, through an IV—not with an intravenous—that’s poor language.

JF: Intravenously.

NU: Intravenously, thank you. And they had a tube in his stomach, because he couldn’t swallow, he would choke. And I thought how terrible not to be able to taste. And the doctor said to me, “Don’t feel badly, because the sense of taste is one of the first things they lose.” But I remember in the beginning when he was okay, we’d go to banquets, and I’d sit there very quietly, only moving from the elbow down, so people couldn’t tell, and I’d be cutting his meat for him on his plate, and sticking it on a fork, so all he had to do was pick up the fork. And I’d be cutting his things. And he seemed to be enjoying his food. He liked Mexican restaurants. But I guess they’re talking about when it’s advanced. They probably mean the advanced cases.

JF: Did you stay in touch with the kids, Mo’s kids, during this time?
NU: More or less. Not that much. I was always in touch with his sisters. If they were in
town, I would see them.

JF: Did they come into town to see him occasionally?

NU: I suppose. I’m not sure when they came. I never knew when they came.
Sometimes the doctors would say “his daughter was here,” or “his son was here.” Once
or twice I happened to walk in, and Mark was there, and he just happened to be in town.
They had sent him on business. He wasn’t in Congress then yet. They’d send him out on
business, and so he stopped by. And I know Anne says she was going there, and they did
say that his daughter was there. And once I remember I bumped into Dodie there with
her whole family, and they had come out just to see him, which was very nice.

JF: That is nice, yeah.

NU: It was special. But I was not part of the decision of them to come—they did it on
their own.

JF: Now, were you active in Washington in organizations?

NU: Uh-huh.

JF: I thought you had been involved in some organizations.

NU: As soon as he got sick, I immediately got involved with the Parkinson’s—
immediately. And Anne did, too. But Anne’s organization is a lobbying organization
that lobbies for appropriations for study. And the one that I lined myself up with is
fundraising for research, rather than lobbying the government for it.

JF: They’re a good complement to each other.

NU: They’re different approaches. For a while, I was on the board of the APDA,
American Parkinson’s Disease Association. And they had kind of a difficult scandal.
Somebody was taking a little money. It was too bad, because he was a person I liked a
lot. So I said reluctantly, “We’re going to have to retire. I don’t want Mo’s name to be
connected with this.” So the other organization, the National Parkinson’s Foundation,
NPF, invited me and Mo to be on the board of governors, which is different than the
board. Their board is very much day-to-day active decisions. The board of governors is
a level up. They have a lot of people there who are well-known on the board.

JF: Do you remain active with them?

NU: Yes. I’ve been on the board of governors. In fact, they gave me an award a couple
of years ago, which I still have at home, a beautiful microscope. I’m going to their
annual meeting in March. I go every year. And I contribute, and I try to get my friends
to contribute. I used to speak—I haven’t for a while—but for a long time I used to go
around and give talks to caregiver groups and patient groups, and I’d bring films of Mo, before and after, and tell them how we dealt with it, and what we did to manage with the disease. You know, there are a lot of things that patients share with each other.

JF: Sure. Oh, yeah. I’m sure that was very valuable, to them.

NU: Well, it was nice. Especially they all seemed to admire him so much that I enjoyed doing that. But I haven’t done it in the last few years. But I did that for quite a while. And then I’m involved with—we all give to all the charities—and I’m a good Democrat, of course. But I belong to the Congressional Spouses, which is a lifetime thing, called the Congressional Club; and Democratic Spouses Forum, which is great—I see all the wives of people we know, and it’s a lot of fun. We have interesting speakers up on the Hill. And then I am also involved with the Former Members of Congress, and those are really fun. And they’re the ones that just adore Mo—they love to tell me things about him. And for a while I was a tutor for the Literacy Council of Northern Virginia. But I found it was very hard putting in the time tutoring. It was private, one on one, and going to the hospital, and trying to have my own life in terms of taking classes and things like that myself. And so finally I gave up the tutoring. The last student I had was so disinterested that it kind of lightened the burden of leaving. She wanted to learn tomorrow, and didn’t want to have to work on it, and didn’t care. So I wasn’t really leaving someone in a bad situation. She was really anxious to get out of it herself.

JF: Well, in 1994, you were appointed trustee of the new Udall Foundation, and you remain on the board almost ten years later.

NU: That’s right. Terry asked me to be chair of the Education Committee.

JF: That’s shocking that it’s been almost ten years since it was formed—seems like yesterday.

NU: Yes. And that grueling thing you have to go through.

JF: FBI checks?

NU: Oh, FBI checks was awful. And also the papers you have to fill out. And they call you on the phone and they ask you the same questions over and over. And you get them in writing, and you send it back. They’ll call you and ask you the same questions over and over, thinking you may….

JF: On the board of trustees with the Udall Foundation, have you had a particular function or specialty or something like that?

NU: Well, I give the report of the Education Committee, and that’s what I do.

JF: So are you head of the Education Committee?
NU: Theoretically. Well, there’s a staff that does the basic work. You know how it works. But I am the chair, and things go out under my name. And I participate in the decision making at the meetings, which is, to me, very important. I tremendously respect Terry, and what he’s done.

JF: Terry Bracy.

NU: Oh, yeah. And then sometimes I have lobbied. I was lobbying for Parkinson’s money. A couple of times Terry asked me to go up on the Hill with him to help lobby for money for the Foundation. And I try to use my husband’s name judiciously, where it’s useful, because it’s a name that people respect, and Mo was a man larger than life—larger than life. As I told you, there were so many things about him that I never knew, because he wasn’t the kind of a man that told you, who bragged. And people come to me with these marvelous, marvelous little blurbs, little stories, about things that he did. Congressmen will tell me how he cleverly gavelled something into law before someone could come and mess it up. And little things that he said that just broke up the House. And his accomplishments were absolutely amazing.

JF: That’s one of the last things I wanted to ask you.

NU: Just such an amazing man.

JF: He passed away in December of 1998, and I wonder what you think his legacy will be.

NU: His legacy, of course, is in the environment, because everybody associates him with that. And his legacy is being a fine human being. He did more than I can imagine any man would do. You remember how he was writing a law textbook in the early morning, and then going on and practicing law the rest of the day. He’d get up at four in the morning. And he did so much in the time that was given to him to be here on Earth. He was, to me—I don’t mean to make it sound corny—but he was the finest human being I’ve ever known in my life. He was a good person, he had principles, he was moral. He never said an off-color word—not that that’s bad. He was honest, he was honorable. He had a brain that was unbelievable. He was so brilliant. And yet he had that folksy, sweet, humble manner. But he’d sit down and write something, and you’d realize how brilliant he was. I remember once we had some of my friends over, and he was sitting on the couch talking to a friend of mine who worked at the oceanography laboratory—not oceanography….

JF: National Oceanographic….

NU: No, it was the planetarium that’s up there near the vice-president’s mansion, the Naval [Observatory]. And she was a speech writer up there, and she had to write about oceanography—that’s what it was—and she told him she was learning about oceanography, and he started talking to her and telling her things. And she sat there with her mouth open. She couldn’t believe…. Here she had been spending weeks going
through all the textbooks, and she said whatever she asked him about, he knew. His mind collected things, and he never forgot. And I think he was a wonderful writer, a talented writer. And I think his heart was in his country. He loved the United States. He loved the beauty of the world. He used to say to me, “Oh, look at that sky! Isn’t that gorgeous? Look what we have. How could anybody want to take that away? How could anybody want to chop down those trees? Look at this! This is such a gift. And these people, they want to make decisions and carve things up. It’s going to be here a long time. Let’s wait and let our great-grandkids make those decisions. Why do we have to tie things in little bundles?” And he would become so emotional when he would see beauty.

JF: I thought Mark put it very well today at the Udall Foundation dedication of their new building, where he said that he and his dad really had that in common, that they would go out into nature and see it sort of as the manifestation of the Creator.

NU: That’s right. And what’s interesting, too, is I always loved nature, but I was not acquainted with the desert. I mean, I’m from California, but the desert there is kind of barren. I had not been exposed to the beautiful vegetation—although parts of California desert do, but not where I lived. He showed me all the different cacti, and he showed me what they do, and the blooms. All of a sudden I realized the richness of the desert, which is something that he knew all along.

JF: And something a lot of people don’t realize. He did truly love the land.

NU: I know this is a corny word he used, but he was such a good man. He was such a good, good man. When my parents came to town, I took them to see him, because my father’s from New Mexico, and a lot of Udalls live in New Mexico. And he was so tender to my parents, and so sweet to them. Really…. I’m gonna cry! (laughter)

JF: Well, this is probably actually a good time to end it.

NU: I think so.

JF: I don’t have any more questions.

NU: I thought the last few words were summing.

JF: I think that’s a wonderful way to end it.

NU: He was good.

JF: A good man.

NU: He was a good human being.

JF: What more can anyone want to be said of them?
NU: Even though he was a life-long Mormon and respected the religion, and his parents were so involved, he would have no part of it when he heard their attitude toward the blacks. And that took a lot of strength in a family that’s so tied up in Mormon history. Although I think they don’t do that anymore. But at the time…. They changed.

JF: I know going into the service in World War II, and serving directly with the blacks, and then coming back and finding that African Americans were treated so differently in his church was hard on him.

NU: Did you know Mo commanded a company of blacks when he was in the military?

JF: No, I didn’t know that.

NU: He did. And he said when he was running for president, one of them came over to him years later, because he was just around twenty at the time—this was thirty years later—and the man said, “I remember you, and you were the fairest man I ever met.”

JF: That’s wonderful.

NU: Yes. But, you know, he used to always get excited. He would tell me about some bill or some piece of legislation, and he’d say, “What about all the little guys? What about all the little people out there? The little people who don’t have a voice, who don’t have power. What are we going to do about all the little people who aren’t organized, and don’t have somebody here in Washington?” And that was a concern of his, the little people out there.

JF: Yeah, that was always a concern of his.

NU: And he was very upset about the poor. Very upset about the poor. You don’t have a lot of poor in Arizona, do you?

JF: Oh, yes, very definitely.

NU: Do you? I thought they had pretty good employment.

JF: We have a large immigrant population, agricultural migrant workers.

NU: Oh, that’s right, you’re near the border. Well, he was very concerned about poverty. I guess that’s the way a Democrat ought to be.

JF: Uh-huh. Well, thank you so much.

NU: My final word is I loved him very much . . .

JF: Well, that’s a wonderful thing to hear, and a wonderful final word.
NU: And it’s too bad that I didn’t have more of him.

JF: Or have him longer, and in better health, longer.

NU: One of his poker buddies, who died in a very bad sailing accident about ten years ago, his wife is a very good friend of mine, and we do a lot of things together [unclear]. And this fellow was witty and funny and terrific—Dick Conlin [phonetic]. I don’t know if you know about him. I don’t think you knew about him. I won’t go into all of it. But anyway, she and I do a lot of things together: go to theater, and we do many things, take trips. And we always say, “Just think, if Dick and Mo were here, the fun we’d have, the great trips we’d take, the fun evenings. We’d laugh, joke around.”

JF: They’re probably out doing their laughing and joking around and causin’ trouble somewhere else. (laughs)

NU: They’re reorganizing Heaven.

JF: (laughs) That’s a very good way to put it!

NU: You know, a lot of people, when they talk about John McCain’s bill, a lot of people did not know, they kept saying, “The law that’s on the books is twenty-two years old.” They didn’t know that was Mo’s law.

JF: Which bill are you referring to?

NU: John McCain’s campaign finance reform. And they said, “Well, the same limitations are in place, and they’ve been the same for twenty-two years,” before McCain’s bill. “And,” they said, “it’s time for a new campaign finance reform bill.” But that legislation that has been in place for twenty-three years, that was Anderson-Udall.

JF: That’s right, the Anderson-Udall Bill.

NU: Yeah. And I’m not sure people knew that.

JF: Oh, that was the Anderson-Udall Bill.

NU: Were you there, then?

JF: Yes, I was.

NU: John Anderson came to visit him, too, by the way—another guest I forgot.

JF: I interviewed John Anderson, and he readily admitted that not long after that, it needed to be tweaked some more. And that’s continued along the line. Yes, Mo has a legacy in a number of areas.
NU: Well, it’s just so interesting. I think I told you, I’ll make a phone call to get, let’s say, airplane tickets or something, it’s an 800 number, and they’ll ask my name. And they’ll say, “Are you any relation to the Udall?” And I’ll say, “Yes, that was my husband.” “(gasp) Oh, my favorite politician! Oh, what a wonderful man.” And I’ll say, “Well, where are you?” “Well, I’m in St. Petersburg, Florida,” or “I’m in Iowa” somewhere, or whatever. And it’s just so amazing. People look at my credit card, and they get so excited. I’ve had people jump over the counter to hug me and shake my hand. Isn’t that marvelous?

JF: That is marvelous.

NU: So in a way…. I can leave you with this thought, and you can put it in any way you want to. I feel that the legacy—my personal legacy, to me, that Mo left me—is the fact that he gave me his name to use judiciously in the right causes, and in the right spirit. And to put myself visibly for a cause that would be something that he would support, and endorse something publicly that the name Udall should be connected with. So that, in a way, is furthering his legacy, by giving me his name to use.

JF: To continue it.

NU: Such as in environment or whatever else. And especially in the Parkinson’s, too. I gave the Parkinson people the pen that—you know, there’s always several pens—that Bill Clinton used when he signed the Parkinson Bill.

JF: Oh, that’s a nice thing for them to have.

NU: I gave them a pen and I gave them a copy of the bill, and they framed it, and they have it in their lobby.

JF: Very nice thing for them to have. Well, I think that’s an excellent summing up.

NU: It’s like I carry that with me. It’s a little weapon I have in society, that I can use the name Mo Udall, or Mrs. Mo Udall, in a way to effect good things happening. And I would do that for Mo—not all the time, but I mean when things…. They called me, for example, they wanted me to endorse a juvenile diabetes thing. And I said, “Sure, put my name on there. But make sure you say Mrs. Morris Udall.” That’s what I mean. Because I want Mo’s name to stay out there.

JF: And I think it’s doing a pretty good job of staying out there. And that’s part of the purpose of these tapes, too, is to keep them.

NU: Well, when you come, I want you to visit me.

JF: Okay, I’ll do that.
[END OF INTERVIEW]