

***3 STEWART UDALL: RENAISSANCE MAN**

The sheer volume of historical copy occasioned by the passing of our friend and mentor Stewart L. Udall would, at this hour, leave little to be said about even the most accomplished man. And yet, in the case of this unique figure, there seems always to be more to say. For Stew, as younger brother Mo Udall called him, was a true Renaissance man whose contributions reached into every corner of American life.

His biography requires no embellishment. The facts say it all and combine to write one of the great narratives of an American life lived in the troubled years of the twentieth century. What distinguished Stewart was not only his ability to survive the perils of war and economic depression, but his unique ability to emerge from each experience with an expanded view of what is possible and a commitment to a life motivated by idealism.

In his last public appearance, a celebration in Tucson in November renaming the Udall Foundation to honor him alongside his brother Mo, he spoke in a halting but still passionate voice about America's role in the world and how concerned he was that we were losing our way. "Our country has become too well-recognized for its power and its military achievements," he said. "Earlier in my life, ... in the [19]20s, the '30s, our country was esteemed worldwide, ... respected by everyone, not for our military power, not for the victories we had won with guns, but for our idealism."

These words were spoken by a man who risked his life as a tail gunner--perhaps the most deadly of all assignments--and flew fifty missions in the height of the air offensive that ultimately crushed Hitler. Yet, typical of the conflicts that swarmed within his brilliant mind, he never in public life made reference to his Air Medal or other tributes to his bravery as a warrior. When asked why he was perhaps the only political figure who never embraced his service as a qualification for election, he said he could never bring himself to talk about it because he was one of the "lucky ones." War reminded him only of friends lost and the destruction of governance and civil discourse. Somehow, Stewart grew with every experience, good or bad.

*4 He returned to the University of Arizona in 1946, a former Mormon missionary who was now a member of the NAACP. From his military experience, he had seen what the victimization of the Jewish people had caused, and he had befriended many of the African-American soldiers with whom he served. He believed that bigotry in every form must be fought with the same passion he felt when he enlisted to battle the evil of Nazism. He came to detest bias in every form: race, religion, sexual preference, and age.

And when he returned to normal life at the University of Arizona, he decided with brother Mo to act on his beliefs. One day in 1947, Stewart and Mo were heading to lunch together at the Student Union dining hall--the only place to eat on campus. At that time, Stew was nearing the completion of law school, and Mo was student body president. On their way, they saw a group of black students gathered outside near Old Main. Black students were allowed to buy food in the dining hall but had to eat outside. Stewart and Mo decided it was time to change the policy, and they escorted Morgan Maxwell Jr., a freshman whose father was a school principal in Tucson, into the dining room and insisted he be served. He was, and thereafter blacks were permitted to eat in the dining room.

Stewart's first elective office was as a member of the Amphitheater School Board, where he participated in desegregating the Amphitheater School District before the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*. And when he was Secretary of Interior, Stewart continued this effort when, as Interior Secretary and the federal landlord, he threatened to refuse the all-white Washington Redskins access to the new D.C. stadium. That threat brought to a losing Washington franchise its first black player, Bobby Mitchell, who turned the team around and had even the most resistant fans cheering--and praising the Interior Secretary.

Like brother Mo, Stewart was a great athlete, who in fact caused Arizona's basketball team to get an invitation to the National Invitational Tournament at Madison Square Garden in 1946. As reported by Greg Hansen in the Arizona Daily Star on March 15, 2010, Stewart Udall marched into the Star newsroom and showed the sports editor a petition signed by the entire basketball team, requesting the Star's support for the proposition that the 25-and-4 Wildcats should be invited to the NIT--then, a much bigger deal than now. The Wildcats were invited to play, traveling three days by train to New York City, which none of them had ever seen before. They lost to a much stronger Kentucky team, 77 to 53.

Here again, as an accomplished and intensively competitive athlete, Stewart revealed another contradiction. In later life, he often reflected on the "professionalization of college sports" and the need always to be number one. In conversations with friends, he would often muse: "What is wrong with second place? That's a great accomplishment." He considered sports commentators who view silver medals in the Olympics as failures as reflective of a society whose values are askew.

Many of Stewart's accomplishments as Secretary of the Interior are fairly well-known. He oversaw historic growth in the national park and wildlife refuge systems, and he was the leading advocate for successful legislation that created wilderness areas, wild and scenic rivers, and the national trails system. He also fostered the arts during his tenure, convincing President Kennedy to invite the renowned poet Robert Frost to speak at his *5 inauguration and setting in motion initiatives that led to the creation of the Kennedy Center, Wolf Trap Farm Park, the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities, and the revived Ford's Theatre.

While Secretary, he managed to find time to write one of the seminal books of the environmental movement: *A Quiet Crisis*. Published in 1963, the work warned of the dangers of pollution, overuse of natural resources, and dwindling open spaces. Along with Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, *The Quiet Crisis* is credited with creating a consciousness in the country that ultimately led to the environmental movement.

After he left government service, Stewart began another career as a crusader for victims of radiation exposure resulting from the government's Cold War nuclear programs. He brought a lawsuit against the U.S. government on behalf of families of Navajo men who suffered lung cancer from mining uranium for the government. Another lawsuit sought compensation for people who lived downwind from aboveground nuclear tests in Nevada during the 1950s and early 1960s. The lawsuits failed in court but eventually produced results. They provided a mountain of evidence for congressional investigations into the safety of the nation's nuclear weapons complex. In 1990, the Radiation Exposure Safety Act was enacted to compensate thousands of individuals. In 1994, he wrote an exposé of the devastating effects of the nuclear age called *The Myths of August: A Personal Exploration of Our Tragic Cold War Affair with the Atom*.

And ultimately, Stewart was a husband, father, and brother. Stewart and his wife Lee were married for more than fifty years, until her death in 2001, and he remained devoted to her until his death. He and Lee raised six children, all strong, talented, and capable individuals.

One of the admirable ironies of Stewart Udall's life is that many of his greatest achievements as a human being were acts of quiet dignity and never reported. He remains one of the true heroes of the greatest generation who lived his beliefs and spoke his piece. And yet, never did he seek personal gain by employing his remarkable connections for financial gain. Nor did he ever advance his own ambitions by tearing down a fellow human being. To adopt the lexicon of this computer age, his life is a template for us all, especially the young, to embrace and adopt. Contradictions and all.

Footnotes

^{a1} Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Morris K. Udall and Stewart L. Udall Foundation, a Tucson-based federal agency. Terry was a senior congressional aide to Morris Udall for ten years in the 1960s and 1970s and has known Stewart Udall well since that time.

^{aa1} Executive Director of the Morris K. Udall and Stewart L. Udall Foundation, and a 1983 graduate of the University of Arizona James E. Rogers College of Law.