

# 'UW—The Root of What I Am'

By Rick Carpenter  
 ALUMNEWS Editor

While some people figure Senator Alan K. Simpson knew from an early age he was going to follow in his father Milward's footsteps as a football and basketball player at the University of Wyoming, then to the U.S. Senate and wind up receiving one of the University's highest honors as a Distinguished Alumni, the younger Simpson admits his road to Washington certainly wasn't as paved as he would have liked it to be.

In fact, the only light at the end of the tunnel was usually an oncoming train ready to smash his hopes and dreams. But, Simpson says now he realizes he made it hard on himself, although he wouldn't admit it at the time.

After graduating from Cody High School in 1949 and spending a year at Cranbrook School in Detroit, Simpson entered the University with the goal of getting a bachelor of science degree in law.

As with many incoming freshmen, the university scene can be quite scary for those who come from cities and towns with less population than the University's student enrollment. Simpson was no exception.

"I felt very lonely and very disrupted the first year because I was a yard ... at least to me I was. And I had a magnificent complexion which was about zits ear-to-ear, Simpson told the *ALUMNEWS* during an August legislative break. "I had self-doubts and self-pity that you go through and here I was at the University.

"I lived in a dorm by myself and people would look at me — and ya know I was huge, I weighed 260 then — and they'd say 'well, you must be a football player.'"

Simpson, who was already sensitive because his father was president of the UW Board of Trustees, decided to go out for freshman football even though he had no scholarship.

"I was not a good football player and I went out for freshman football because I thought 'well, if I don't go out for football, they'll call me a chicken,'" he said.

Freshman coach John Bailey encouraged Simpson and continually rode him in practice until he made a player out of him. To get him to lose about 20 pounds when he arrived at practice weighing 260, Bailey put him in a steam room with Ox Zellner, now a Casper sporting goods dealer.

Of the two in the steam room, Simpson said "he fattened up on



Although Al Simpson never learned to write a line, he has little trouble throwing a line as he demonstrates at the K Bar Ranch near Laramie.

White Calf Ale and I had a Budweiser tumor."

By the end of his freshman year, Bailey had kept to his promise and had made a player out of Simpson and offered him a football scholarship, which he accepted.

"I played right in front of the center's nose and tried to get the ball loose from the center when he snapped the ball," he said. And, in those days, there was an incentive to do so as Simpson said players were

He didn't exactly become a team player.

"Pete Fowler and I, we never played a lot (in games), so we just kind of went out and saw the local sights in the various communities where we played basketball," he said.

The final game of the season between Colorado State and UW was to not only decide the conference winner, but the winner would go on to the NCAA tournament in Corvallis, Oregon and the loser would travel to

disappointment (in not going to New York)."

Despite his somewhat questionable loyalty at the time, Simpson was elected president of the "W" letterman's club. He also served in the student senate with his future wife, the former Ann Schroll.

Simpson is candid about his college days and says his ornery lifestyle during his first four years of college was a product of the preacher's son syndrome of having his father serve as president of the board of trustees and because of his personal feelings of insecurity at the time.

"I always like to say that when I was at the University of Wyoming, I weighed 260, had hair and thought beer was food," he said.

"Dad was president of the board of trustees while my brother Pete (now the Vice President for Development at UW) and I were in school. We were very proud of him — and are — but, you know how you feel like 'Oh boy, I'd better be one of the guys here or you know what they'll say ...'

"I don't know, I think I was defensive sometimes and did some things I probably wouldn't have in an effort to be one of the guys.

"I thought I could drink beer; I was a lush, I really put it away. I was 6'7" and weighed 240 pounds (he now looks thin at 195 lbs.) and, you know,

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routinely rewarded \$5 for recovering fumbles and \$7.50 for blocking kicks.

By the time he was a senior and in the first year of law school, the dean called Simpson in and asked him if he was going to play football or go to law school? With the team under a new coach who believed in two-platoon football with players playing the entire game, Simpson said it was a "good time to get out" because he didn't have time to learn both offense and defense while trying to study in law school.

Besides football, Simpson also played basketball at UW where he was the 10th man on a 10-man squad.

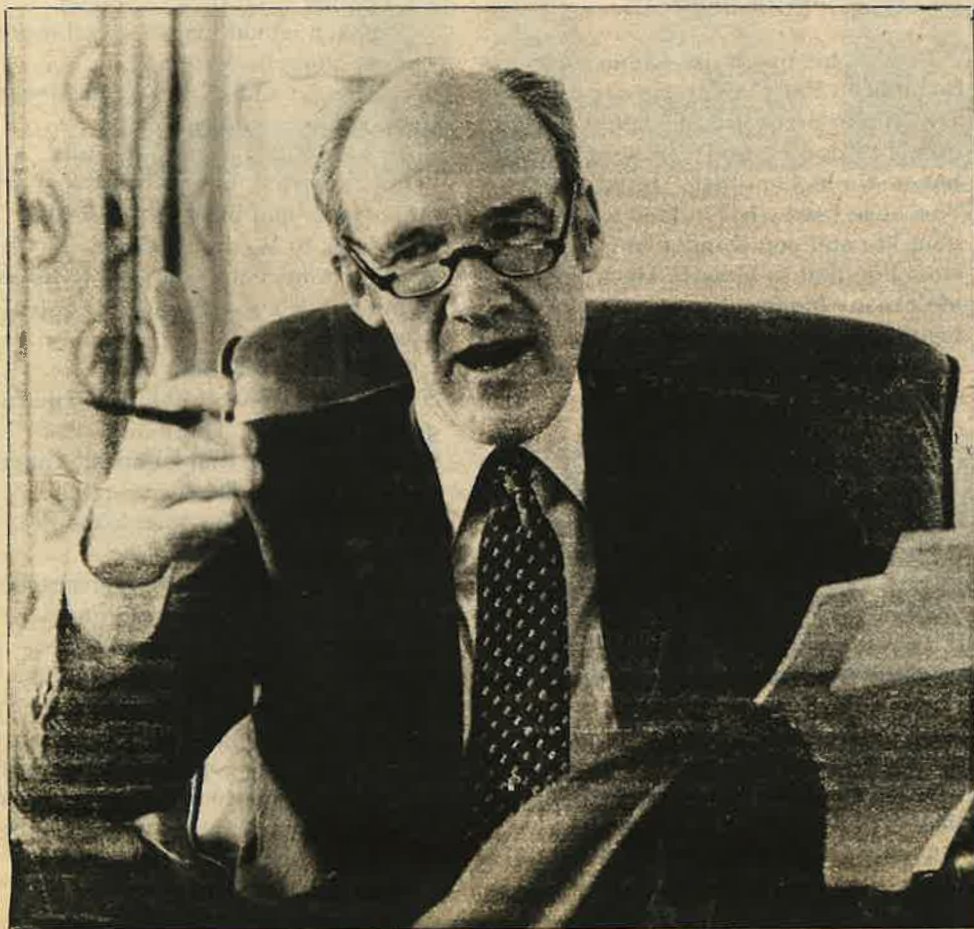
New York City to play in the National Invitation Tournament.

"Oh! Pete and I were so excited about the prospect of going to New York, we were praying for a loss. But Ron Rivers hit a jump shot with no time left and we beat CSU in Ft. Collins," Simpson said.

"Pete threw a blanket up in the air and it came down on Ev's head and the announcer said 'Ev Shelton (the UW coach) is on the floor, I think he's had a stroke, a heart attack or something because they've thrown a blanket on him.'

"So, Pete and I were trying to cover him up to show our

## U.S. Senator Alan K. Simpson, Recipient 1985 University of Wyoming Distinguished Alumni Award



As a Senator, Simpson has used his quick wit and charisma to rise quickly within his party ranks and serves as the Senate's Assistant Majority Leader.

there is something to that embalming fluid and weight theory."

Simpson remembers a contest dreamed up on campus to figure out just how much beer a person could possibly consume within 24 hours. Under the rules, contestants could eat anytime they wished or take the necessary breaks when needed. They would even refill your container if your beer got warm by marking the side of the container and refilling it with cold beer.

For some reason, Al doesn't remember who won the contest but he remembers his own stats. "I did 5½ gallons in 24 hours and, I tell ya, I have the quickest kidneys on earth. I drank straight out of a Yellowstone lard can.

"That's called abuse. I did a little more of that to be one of the guys. But, that's what you do in life, sometimes," he said.

Simpson also told of an instance where he saw a student come out of a bar on old Front Street. "The guy was all bloody from being in a knife fight and I said 'God, you dumb bastard, what are you doing in there with a knife, you can get killed in there.'

"He said, 'well, I'll just take a piece of you, Mr. Know-it-all.'

"So, I just took him and threw him down and the cops drove up right at that point. The guy stepped out of the

bushes with his shirt torn, his body all cut and said 'you did that.'

"And I said, 'I didn't touch the SOB.'"

It was Simpson's word against the bloody victim's and before it was over, young Al had a little scuffle with the Laramie Police and wound up in jail.

When students went to the Kappa house to raise money for his bail, his girlfriend and future wife, Ann Schroll was not happy. Neither was the dean who stripped him of a Who's Who on American Campuses honor.

"I was heartbroken, absolutely heartbroken," Al said in a slow manner, remembering as if he could still feel the pain. "I tried to hide it. I said it didn't mean anything to me, but I tell you, it meant a lot. But, I hid that down in the fat."

The incident made Simpson begin to realize he was bringing these types of things on himself. He also began to seriously look at his life, what he was doing and what he was allowing others to do to him through peer pressure.

On a quiet, still August afternoon with a fly rod in one hand and his chin being retrospectively stroked by the other, Al Simpson sat on a log next to a stream and began to tell the ALUMNEWS the importance of those years at UW.

"I spent six years of my life on that campus, two of them married, and

that's where I was shaped and forged, right there in that place. And it matters not whether I was on a lark or finally trying to do it seriously, the issue is that those people and those professors were really the root of what I am," Simpson said in a very serious note. "There isn't anything that happened in my life that was more important than those six years in Laramie."

**"I ran the garbage truck making about \$250 a month and all I could eat."**

After graduating in 1954 with the law degree (the bachelor of science in law allowed future law students to complete the first year of law school while finishing their undergraduate work), Simpson married Ann and lived in a small Laramie apartment and worked on a university garbage truck at the same time his father was running for governor for the first time.

"I ran the garbage truck making about \$250 a month and all I could eat," Simpson jokingly said of those days.

About the same time his father won the gubernatorial race in November of '54, young Al left for Fort Benning, Ga. for a two year stay in the Army where he would shed his excess weight and begin to understand how much he actually wanted the law degree from UW.

"The Army played a big role in my life because for the first time in my life, I couldn't do what I wanted to

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As a 2nd Lieutenant in the 5th Infantry Division and in the 2nd Armored Division (Hell on Wheels) in Germany, Simpson said all he got from Germany was "a gas ulcer and heartburn."

But, more importantly, it's where he said he decided "I was going to either be a boy-man or a man-boy." He began what he calls creeping maturity — "a long process I hope I'll be doing it all the rest of my life."

"I didn't handle that experience well (military life) and then that's

when I began to grow up."

When he finally left the military with the rank of 1st Lieutenant in the fall of 1956, Simpson returned to the Laramie campus to finish the final two years of law school where he learned some lessons about life he now shares as honestly and vividly as if it were yesterday.

"I came back to school and dear ol' John Rames, teaching criminal

law, gave me a 'B.' Hell, I'd never seen a 'B' before," he said.

In his unique manner resembling a combination of Jimmy Stewart's mannerisms and Will Rogers' honest and satirical humor, Simpson said, "Finally, I learned that BS will only get you so far. And then, you'd better rely on your native wit, your intelligence and your common sense."

"And that's when I decided to grow up. It took a professor, a dean, it took a professor who's long gone from here, a man who I wrote an article for the Law Review, who said, 'Well, if this isn't the biggest pile of crap I've ever read.'"

"He said, 'Simpson, you've put in an magnificent array of words and vocabulary which means absolutely nothing because I don't think you know the subject.'"

The lessons he learned from that professor helped form his current philosophical view of how people deal

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with subjects they really don't know much about.

"If you don't know the subject, if you feel inadequate to it, you BS. You BS by putting other people down by using words that you hope they really won't understand and then you sit back and say 'Well, I am smarter than they are.' And you're not, you just outwitted and out BSed yourself," Simpson said.

"That's a very important thing to learn in life for me. I don't BS anyone anymore. Oh, yes, I can. Turn me  
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# Simpson Learned Important Lessons About Life

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loose in a den of BSers and I'll be right at the top when it's over.

"But, if you can't communicate it, what hell good does it do you?"

"And that's what I learned at the University of Wyoming," he said. "Because of these people, I have lived among them all my life, they are articulate and thoughtful and well read and highly opinionated and they can spot a BSer a thousand feet away."

"And on the converse, so can the students." He said he knew of professors that came to UW and didn't last two years because the students will pick them apart if they don't know their subjects or can't explain them in common terms.

Part of Simpson's early problem with expressing himself was that he never was able to master the English language, at least not from a scholastic standpoint.

"I want you to know that when I was a freshman, I had to take 'remedial English.' I couldn't diagram a sentence and still can't. I don't know an adverb from a dangling participle," he confessed. No matter how hard he tried, he just couldn't get it. "Mental block — sure. I don't need a shrink to tell me what it was."

"I can't diagram a sentence today and yet that is one of my strengths, the written word. Yet, I write like I speak. You'll find my letters with just dashes instead of punctuation. I'm not doing it for effect, I just don't know."

For Simpson, the rule became to simply say things honestly.

"Say 'em more honestly. If you feel something, say it," he advises. "And in no way can you mis-identify something you're saying if you feel honestly about it. You can't get clogged up, it just comes out. The words work."

While he was in law school for the final two years, Simpson learned another valuable lesson when a classmate made fun of the way he answered a question in class.

"That's when I learned another great thing in life and that's how to be your own authority," he said from his sermon on the log. "Until you learn to be your own authority, you ain't going to get very far because there

are millions of 'authorities' in the world and they give advice continually and many of them are full of crap.

"So you finally get to the point where you just learn more and say to yourself, 'Simpson, what is right here and what is wrong?'"

"You have to learn to be your own load star."

After graduating "somewhere in the middle to low-middle" of his law class, Simpson scored among the highest of his class on the bar exam in 1958 ("Take that! All of you," he jokes).

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When Al's dad was defeated in his bid for re-election in 1958, the two joined together in a law practice in Cody.

In 1962, however, Milward Simpson was elected to fulfill an unexpired U.S. Senate seat following the sudden death of the elected senator.

Al decided to try his hand at politics in 1964 when a long-time Cody representative, who was Speaker of the House in Wyoming, decided not to run for re-election (Simpson said traditionally, the speaker quits after his term as speaker is completed). Simpson ran because, he said, he wouldn't have to run against an incumbent.

"So, I got in the race for Park County legislator in 1964. I was elected and stayed there until 1977 when I resigned to seek the (U.S.) Senate seat," he said.

His move into the U.S. Senate has drawn rave reviews and now, in only his second term, Simpson serves as Assistant Majority Leader as the Party Whip for the 99th Congress.

He also serves on the committee of veterans' affairs, the judiciary committee, the environment and public works committee and he served on a select committee to investigate the undercover operations

of the FBI and the Department of Justice in 1982 following the ABSCAM investigations.

Despite his quick rise within the Republican Party, Simpson says he has little or no desire to seek higher office. "I don't harbor any lust in my bosom for higher office," he confides, "because I see what it does to limit your life and you wonder why a guy would do that to himself. Heck, there ain't many higher offices; two, I believe."

Besides Simpson loves his job as a senator.

"I like what I do," he said. "This is a remarkable honor. I take it as a sincere honor, kind of a trust. I mean, they give me a lot of headway in Wyoming, a lot of use of my own brain. And they don't second guess me a lot, I admit that, and therefore I feel a sense of trust and I can't violate that either."

Simpson is well known for his humor both at home and on Capitol Hill, but he admits sometimes it gets him into trouble.

"There's a fine line between good humor and smart ass and sometimes I cross that line," he said, "and everytime I cross it, I get slapped ... and I should."

"Humor is my word and my shield in Washington and here. It always has been. It's my leveler, it keeps me from being self-important in the great Oz."

But, Simpson knows when it's time to be serious on the job.

"I have a great honor in being the Assistant Majority Leader of the Senate — a great honor I take seriously."

"That puts new duties on me so that's why they're watching me like a hawk," he says as if he's afraid to stumble. "They watch me to see if these new duties take me away from Wyoming and its problems. So, I

spend more time working communities in Wyoming to be sure I'm hearing what they're saying."

Simpson would like to spend more time at home in Wyoming, particularly on his father's ranch near Cody on the southfork of the Shoshone River (a place he calls "soul country"), but his Washington duties keep him busy. Most of his trips back to Wyoming (he averages 25 trips home each year) are to listen to the public's concerns and to give speeches.

Spending a few hours with Simpson is probably the best way to get to know him. There are some things about him that he doesn't have to tell you. He still affectionately kisses Ann when he must leave her for only a few hours and he introduces himself to nearly everyone he meets, not to try to get votes as most politicians, but because he really seems to have a genuine concern for people he meets.

Instead of trying to act important he makes other people feel important as he talks and listens to people. He is also not afraid to give a warm hug or look you in the eye when he shakes your hand.

This sincerity is a Simpson trait passed from strong family ties.

When the ALUMNEWS caught up with him after he had spent four days with his parents, Simpson said "they are great. They still have their resilience and their humor and their brains and a marvelous sense of values and great love for each other and us. It's a nice warm family."

In fact, he said, "my wife, Ann and Lynne (Pete's wife) are like the daughters they never had."

Simpson's parents' sense of values seems to transcend everything he does and shows what kind of a person he is.

Although those values may not have come out in his early days at UW, Laramie is where he was forced to take a serious look at them. It seems only fitting that after following his dad as a football and basketball player at UW and to the U.S. Senate he now joins his dad as the first father and son to have received the Distinguished Alumni Award for outstanding contributions in his profession.

# Larson Was Forced to Make Tough Decisions

faculty pay and financial support than most other universities in the Rocky Mountain area. We need to continue to do that to have a really good

University.

"Right now, we can attract better faculty and our status and reputation as an institution has grown immensely throughout the country in

the recent years."

And with this continued influx of quality instructors, Larson hopes the University of Wyoming will continue

to challenge students and teach students to learn to get the best out of themselves. Just as Larson was able to do for himself.