

**“Chomsky and Me: A Memoir” ...  
Bev Stohl’s quarter-century as  
Chomsky’s administrative aide  
(G&R 277)**

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For over 25 years Bev Stohl was the administrative aide to Noam Chomsky at MIT. But she was so much more than that ... not only did she manage his office, but become a close personal friend. She recently wrote a memoir of her time with him at MIT and we had a fantastic and poignant conversation about what Noam is like in “real life,” when he’s not writing and speaking about world events.

We found out that Noam thinks scotch provides him protein. That he loves pets. That after Ali G. got in for an interview he told her “no more gold suits.” We discussed how Noam eats egg (singular on purpose). Bev talked about her travels with Noam, including to the Vatican, his long friendship with Howard Zinn, the various people she met who came in to talk with him (including Zack de la Rocha and Tom Morello), how he warmed up to kids and pets, and so much more.

It’s a rare insight into the personal life of the world’s most famous dissident provided by the person who was close to him every day for over a quarter-century.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5DxHaYmiWkM>

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Outro- “Green and Red Blues” by Moody  
Links:

- Chomsky and Me: A Memoir ([bit.ly](https://bit.ly/3k1j1j1))
- Bev’s website: [bevstohl.blogspot.com](http://bevstohl.blogspot.com)
- Instagram: Chomsky and Me A Memoir ([bit.ly](https://bit.ly/3k1j1j1))
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This is a Green and Red Podcast (@PodcastGreenRed) production. Produced by Bob (@bobbuzzanco) and Scott (@sparki1969). “Green and Red Blues” by Moody. Editing by Isaac.

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**Recorded Intro:** Welcome to Green and Red, scrappy politics for scrappy people, a regular podcast on radical environmental and anti-capitalist politics.

**Scott Parkin:** Brought to you by Bob Bezinko and Scott Parkin. I’m your co-host Scott Parkin in Berkeley, California. And as always, I’m joined by Bob Bezinko.

**Bob Bezinko:** That’s right. Today I’m in Houston, Texas, and I’m really excited. This is actually as much as I’ve anticipated a show in a long time. We are speaking with Bev Boisseau. And Bev, and I’m sure a lot of people know your name already, was a longtime assistant, administrative assistant for Noam Chomsky, I believe about 25 years, right? At MIT.

**Bev Stohl:** That’s 25 years and counting, Yeah.

Yeah. At MIT, she’s written a lot about it. And recently, I think in 2023 was the publication date, I believe her. Okay. Published Chomsky and me. I don’t, do you have a hard copy of the book, Scott? Yeah, there we go. I read it in an ebook by Chomsky and me, which is part memoir, but part, I think it’s actually an amazing history too of Noam Chomsky and his meaning and significance. So we are so excited to have you here to talk about not just Noam, but you as well. So welcome to the Green Red Podcast.

**Bev Stohl:** Thank you.

**Bob Bezinko:** Just to get started, to give a little bit of background on you, why don’t you tell us, because I think it’s a funny story about how you ended up getting this position as Noam’s assistant, what you may have known about him. a little bit before that, what your background was. Just tell us a little bit about yourself.

**Bev Stohl:** I had been working at MIT managing some graduate programs in economics and ocean engineering. And I thought, you know what? I really, I love working with the students. I want to get a master’s degree in psych and really work with people every day. I decided I’m going to take an easier job. So I was immediately offered this job working for Noam Chomsky. I knew who he was. I didn’t know a lot. I thought he was like Ralph Nader. I said, what do I have? But the interview with Morris, his colleague, I never met Noam until my third day of work or something. So my interview with Morris was very strange, because he kept saying some things that were a little scary, journalists and the rest of it. So I thought, no big deal. I’m going to be here for three years, and then I’ll go off and do my psych. I can do anything for three years. So I said yes to the job, despite some little cautionary lights that were going off in my head.

**Bob Bezinko:** And once you got there, you were thrown right into it, right into the deep end. And you know what? So what was like your kind of first impressions

those first few months? Were you like just going nuts at the level of activity that you had?

**Bev Stohl:** Yeah, I had, honestly, I thought, like I said, it was supposed to be an easier job. And I thought, what is happening here? It was like the Wizard of Oz. It was like Oz. It was a whole new world. I had worked at MIT, but this place was different. This place was, first of all, the furniture, it was like Fred Flintstone days. It was very old. And we were in the building 20, the old decrepit building 20. And no one liked it there because he said that's where they keep all of their troublemaking professors, the rabble rousers. Building 20 was wonderful. I loved it. We were there for a number of years before we had to move out temporarily. But it was an interesting place. I had a sense of humor. I thought, who is this guy? He's completely opposite from me. He's Jewish, I'm an ex-Catholic, he's from this very learned academic, family rabble rousers there. And I was just from a blue collar family. And I thought, how is this gonna go? And the first time I tried to joke with him was about the Unabomber, and that didn't go over. So I told him when he said, be careful of packages that come in. And I thought, we'll just give them a little shake. He said, no.

**Bob Bezinko:** Did he really have a nutcase file? You discovered.

**Bev Stohl:** I hate to say that for sure, but yes, it was something called Nutcase. I was very happy that I wasn't in it because we had approached him. I have this weird habit of I have a gift of talking backwards fluently. Don't ask me what I do with it. But.

**Bob Bezinko:** We're going to ask you about that at the end. I'm going to put you on the spot.

**Bev Stohl:** There were so there was a nutcase file and I made sure that I wasn't in it because we had approached him a TV news show and approached him six months before asking him to interview me about talking backwards. And I don't think they ever.

**Bob Bezinko:** Heard back. Yeah. And I know Scott has a bunch too, but that one thing, what amazes me and I used to say this, I remember because I started communicating with him probably around that time when you came on in the early nineties. And I talked to other people, including I had a colleague who was at MIT and he said one time over break, I guess the post office was closed and he was looking for something. He went in and they were like, this is the old days with regular mail. And there were six bags of mail and five were just for no. And so I can just imagine how many emails a day and how many letters were you getting and how did you cope with all of it?

**Bev Stohl:** That's right. Because this was before cell phones, before texting was just happening. It was very basic. He probably got six or seven, maybe 10 texts a day. As opposed to when I left in 17, when I retired, he moved. I think we were getting probably 800 a day.

**Bob Bezinko:** Just text. Whoa.

**Bev Stohl:** Yeah. I'm sorry. Emails.

**Bob Bezinko:** Emails. Okay. But still, whoa.

**Bev Stohl:** We didn't know. I meant to say e-mail, but still, yeah, lots of emails, lots of emails. So yeah, and he answered everyone. So we used to have probably a pile this thick at the end of the day of letters that he'd write himself. And then he'd send them to us, me, my assistant, to print out, and he'd sit and sign, sign. There's nobody, almost nobody he didn't respond to. You can ask me.

**Bob Bezinko:** I heard that before, and I was going to ask you that because I just didn't believe it when I heard this. No one has that kind of time, right? I remember the first letter I ever got from him. I was on a research trip and I came on, there's a big pile of mail and I'm going through it and I see this thing that says MIT Department of Philosophy or I forget what it was. And then back in my head, I'm thinking like, there's no way it could be. I'm shaking as I open it, thinking there's no way it could be. It was from no home. I was just like, oh my God, like I mean something in the world.

**Bev Stohl:** Yeah, there was once in a while, once in a while, somebody would write and they were way off the wall. And if they kept writing and they had good intentions about changing the world, just their way was a little bit strange.

**Bob Bezinko:** Yeah.

**Bev Stohl:** He would probably answer every five messages from them if they were insistent. And then after a while, I'd say, Noam, do you want to keep doing this? And in a very blue moon, he, my dog worked with us for about.

**Bob Bezinko:** Yeah, cat, right?

**Bev Stohl:** And he'd say, do you want to pass? Her name was Roxy. He'd say, do you want to pass this one on to Roxy?

**Bob Bezinko:** Maybe she didn't reply. But didn't he also call the dog cat?

**Bev Stohl:** Yes, he did. He thought that was pretty funny. Maybe he just didn't see her. He wasn't.

**Scott Parkin:** And besides this large amount of mail and an e-mail that he got, one of the things I note in the book is that it's days of interviews and people coming to visit and things like that. What was it? Were there typical days with him in the office or what was a typical day like?

**Bev Stohl:** Yeah. So on Mondays, we usually caught up by e-mail. We did a lot of our corresponding. on the computer back and forth. So on Mondays, that's what we did. He prepared his talks and whatever. I sent him e-mail constantly. My assistant sent him e-mail constantly. And then on Tuesday, he came in for meetings and continued to send him emails on those days. And then on Wednesday, he again was home. Thursdays, he came in for class, but he'd come in and meet with people before class. And again, the emails were going back to his house. And then, and he didn't have a computer in the office until many years later. And then on Friday, he came in again for his usual cruise and interviews with students. Yeah, Friday was a full day, Tuesday was a full day, Thursday was a half a day, but he was working till four o'clock in the morning

every day. I can do this. He slept about, I would say, five hours a night at the very most.

**Scott Parkin:** Wow.

**Bob Bezinko:** I know there are times, because I'm at 2 hours, when he was at MIT, I was 2 hours behind him. And there are times like late at night, I do a lot of my emails. So I would write, assuming that maybe the next day or day after, 00 AM his time, I get a response. And I was like, I think one time I was suddenly like, you sleep.

**Bev Stohl:** He once called, he called one of the librarians at 1:00 AM and answered his question because he couldn't get on the system. And at the end it was about 1 30 and he said, she said to Nome, do you know what time it is? He said, oh, I'm so sorry.

**Scott Parkin:** There's a, you have a chapter on Howard Zinn and the passing of Howard Zinn, and you talk about the wobbly spirit, which Howard Zinn brings up. And I, could you talk a little bit about how that was, that it comes across in the book as very much a learning moment for you. And I'm wondering if you could just talk about that a little bit.

**Bev Stohl:** Tell me what you mean by wobbly spirit, because there are a lot of ways I can look at that statement.

**Scott Parkin:** I believe you, I think it's like a reference to how there was. There was this movement of folks who were organizing miners and other day laborers and things like that. Yeah, about Iww. And there was like an Iww song. I think there was song at Howard Zen's funeral and and things like that. And then you also included an e-mail exchange with Gnome. about when he went to visit miners in South America and how that was.

**Bev Stohl:** Yeah, all of that was so touching. And at Howard's funeral, right, there was a gentleman who sang the Joe Hill song. I'm not dead, I'll never die, said he. And we were all in tears. But I think at the base of Noam's work and Howard's was the working person. Always. That was always what came first. I don't care if there was a head of state or a president of something in our office. If somebody came in and somebody wanted an appointment, he would shorten that person to a working person, to a student, to the little guy, right?

**Scott Parkin:** Right.

**Bev Stohl:** So there was, yeah, there was a lot of compassion for them, a lot of energy put into that world of hardworking people who are wrongly jailed, same kind of category. Why are we jailed? Because big corporations are when other people should be in jail. And no one was always walking around saying the wrong people are in jail. And so he had a lot of a lot of compassion for those people. And so did Howard. And Howard was also a playwright. And I believe that he some of his plays touched on this as well. Yeah, I'm sure a million examples will come to me later, but right now I'm not getting any more.

**Scott Parkin:** And in the chapter, you talk about how that was a sort of where you began to really learn more about the history and the politics associated. There's

the wildly spirit, but in many ways, it's a bigger picture related to left politics in the US and the world.

**Bev Stohl:** Exactly. And the other thing you just touched upon was that I always thought it was about everybody else. The songs Joan Baez sang about people trying to make a living and being persecuted and all of the working people and what they suffered through. And when I went to Howard's funeral, it dawned on me really in a burst, like a bright light coming from above, as they say, that, wait a minute, this is about me, us. This is about us right here. It's about my family. It's about the times now. My father was a working person. In fact, that's a whole other tangent, but you could at that time buy a house no matter what. You didn't have to have a college degree. My father bought a house and he was a salesman. He was a good one, but he was a salesman. And it dawned on me that I started crying for my father, who had passed away by then, about how hard he worked to make sure that his family had a home. You can't do that. I don't care if you're making \$150,000 these days, at least in these parts. You can't buy a house for that. So I don't mean to go off on a tangent, but there are so many tangential thoughts to every single thing that happened in that office. I never stopped. I never stopped thinking about it all.

**Scott Parkin:** But we're definitely big on the tangents here. So keep going off on tangents.

**Bev Stohl:** Excellent.

**Bob Bezinko:** Noam was larger than life for a long time. And I think people didn't understand just he's a human, he's a guy and he's got a sense of humor and he had all these other things and He just gave so much of his time up. I mean, do you want to just talk a little bit about just his commitment? Because like you said, he was just on the go constantly. He could have just written books and done nothing else because he could have done any of that. But he didn't. He could answer every e-mail, which is still amazing to me because when I get crazy emails, I just delete them.

**Bev Stohl:** I got some pretty funny reactions from people when he did write. There were a lot of words I can't say on this show, but they were like, kidding me? He wrote back to me. Yeah, yeah. But your original question was about how he did it, why he did it, the fact that he did it.

**Bob Bezinko:** Just a little, just how he gave up his time and he was just...

**Bev Stohl:** He didn't give up his time. This was what he did. And like I said in the book, it was almost as if he lived here. He lived in those places. If you walked into his kitchen at home, not one cabinet was closed. He didn't notice. The temple things I had to almost call him down, just like when he went in for a meeting, I had to almost say, okay, no, let's reel you in. You need to be here. And you can see his mind joining him in his body. Whether it was for an interview, he was just, that's who he was. I don't think he would've continued to live without that. And of course, every June when he had to leave the office and go, of course he worked still on the Cape, he had a little dozen office in the basement and he would continue to work there and once in a while his family would drag him out, go on a boat, go do some gardening. So he tried to

find some balance that way. Yeah. So he just was driven. He couldn't not do it. And in fact, I think.

**Bob Bezinko:** Well, no, one of those, like you said, that there were times when like he forgot to eat and didn't have food in the house and.

**Bev Stohl:** He forgot to eat to make it easy. He only, I sometimes went shopping, especially after Carol died. And I'm sure she tried to feed him before, but I'd say, look, I'm going to the store. I'll pick you up a few things. I'll bring them back at lunchtime and you can take them home. Or I'd go to his house with food. And he only ate white things. So that was the way to make, that made it very easy for me in the store. Okay. Hummus, bread, whatever, just white things. So cottage cheese. Maybe some celery, a little green in there, tomatoes. It got to the point where I saw him eating this awful big sticky bun. And I said, what is that? And he said, breakfast. My partner and I started cooking for extra at night. Bring him in on Tuesdays and Fridays. I'd bring him food, whether he could eat it then or take it home. Yeah.

**Bob Bezinko:** And did he really try to convince you that there was protein in scotch?

**Bev Stohl:** Absolutely. And water. And there was water in scotch. I'd say, are you drinking water? Because he would get dehydrated as we all do after a certain age. And remember, he was 70, no, 66 when I started working for him.

**Bob Bezinko:** Yeah.

**Bev Stohl:** He was 88 or something, 64 and 88. Yeah, he was 88 when I stopped working. I thought he's going to retire anytime.

**Bob Bezinko:** Yeah.

**Bev Stohl:** So yeah, he thought there was, I said, are you drinking water? I'd write him and say, are you drinking water? And he'd say, Yeah, I put some in my scotch. That's their cows, right?

**Scott Parkin:** Yeah, I think you said coffee. He also saw coffee as protein as well.

**Bev Stohl:** Unbelievable.

**Bob Bezinko:** This is just a side like the first time I ever met him, I went to a talk and we had corresponded and I introduced myself and he said, do you want to get breakfast tomorrow? So I was on cloud 9. And I remember like he ordered eggs and I just I couldn't get over it. Noam Chomsky eats eggs like he's mortal like the rest of us.

**Bev Stohl:** Was it eggs or egg?

**Bob Bezinko:** It may have been an egg, but just Yeah, but I still couldn't believe it. I just thought he like existed on oxygen and floated in the heavens or something.

**Bev Stohl:** Yeah, he somewhat did. But I remember the United for Justice with Peace group, I think in Arlington here, because there were a million of them. I asked him to submit a recipe for their book, their recipe book, and it was a scrambled egg. If there are two of you, make two eggs. I thought, oh my God. There might have been a piece of toast involved.

**Bob Bezinko:** I think he had toast that day too, but I was just mesmerized by the fact that he's a human. He eats eggs. I was thinking of writing a story called No Chomsky Eats Eggs.

**Bev Stohl:** He'll probably tell you what came first, the chicken or the egg.

**Bob Bezinko:** He would know if anybody would, right? If anybody would know, it would have been him. I'm sorry, Scott, I cut you off. Oh, I thought I cut you off there. You didn't cut me off. One of my favorite pictures, there's some great photos in here too, is the one of Nome with the Sufi. wearing the hat and the shawl. And I assume he probably did a lot of that. Now, on one hand, he doesn't look uncomfortable doing it. Did you have a lot of people come in who really embraced him in that way?

**Bev Stohl:** It's funny you should say that because I just finished a slideshow that I think I may make into a book for little kids like the Ruth Bader Ginsburg one. Here's how you can know about Chomsky. But yeah, he was all such a good sport. And in fact, I talked about that in the slideshow about how people sent him things and said, okay, this is the name of our, can I have a picture of you doing this for our organization? Or this is the address, and he'd have a piece of paper. So he did this a lot. The guy who made gnomes out of, made thin gnomes and gnome gnomes and garden gnomes, he'd hold those up and I'd take his picture. Somebody gave him a big photo of himself and he had to pose with it. And that went on probably every day.

**Bob Bezinko:** Oh, really? Am I?

**Scott Parkin:** Yeah, you're good.

**Bob Bezinko:** Am I good? Okay. We can fix that. Yeah.

**Scott Parkin:** One thing, there's a, you, and he even blurbs your book, Michel Gondry, and he made a, he made an animated film about Gnome. Is the tall man, is the man who is tall, happy? And I'm wondering if you could talk about that a bit.

**Bev Stohl:** That was fabulous. And the idea is that, is the man who is tall, happy? Take out the is, it's the linguistic thing. And you put the is, the man who is tall is happy. How that one word change changes the whole sentence. So Michel is a character. He's done some really interesting movies, right? The Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind and the rest. He is just one of my favorite characters. And he decided he was going to do this animated movie of Gnome's life. And he came in with his eight millimeter camera and we had his film in the freezer for when he came back from Paris four or five months later. And he interviewed Nome again. And then he went home and he made all of the different what do you call them? Anyway, I can't, the word just flew outta my mind, my head, but he drew everything up. Oh, okay. And it was just wonderful. The movie, I think for those of us, especially who are visual learners to watch this, this documentary, just to see. Okay, Nome's talking about a tree growing and you can see the tree growing. And if you cut a limb off the tree and you plant it, is it the same tree? So he was proving some point. And he used my dog, Roxy, to demonstrate one of the, something in linguistics. What was it? I just had to, again, it flew out of my head. I think it's too hot in here too. But he used her to illustrate a couple of things. And we run in at the end. And Noma's just such a good sport about it. He enjoyed

it. He enjoyed it. And it was just after his first wife, Carol, had died. And so there was some touching thing, a couple of touching scenes in there about them riding bikes together, things that they did. So the whole thing was just when Michelle came back after a number of months, we'd all sit around like kids and watch what he had done on the screen. And it was one of the upbeat things because we certainly saw a lot of dark things in that office. So to have Michelle come back and, uh, and just be so playful was so needed.

**Bob Bezinko:** Yeah.

**Bev Stohl:** Perked us all up. Yeah.

**Bob Bezinko:** I think that's a part of him too that's really important to get out there because we see him as almost like a machine. He's just so brilliant. And when he did have that, I didn't know him. I try not to, I don't want to pretend I'm bragging. I know him now like thousands of others I had contact with him, but I noticed that he could just be like a regular guy and it made me feel at ease. And when we began, you said you were from a blue-collar background and so was I. And I think he appreciated people like that rather than all the kind of stuffy Ivy Leaguers who we all run into so often.

**Bev Stohl:** Yeah, it's absolutely true.

**Bob Bezinko:** Yeah, I remember telling him, I come from Sicilian peasants. He said, given the way the world is, I'd much rather be hanging out with Sicilian peasants. It was really cute. You ran into not just filmmakers, but a lot of kind of well-known people. And they were there to see known, but they also entered your life. And you got to use this for cred within the family with your son, people like Tom Morello and Pearl Jam and many others. You want to just talk? That must have been a kick, right? That must have been a lot of fun.

**Bev Stohl:** Yeah. And Rocha there, the guy. Zach Diller. He was fabulous. Yeah, he, and I used it. I used this. My son, when you have a teenage son or whoever he was then, maybe he was in his early twenties, you wanna be a cool parent, right? No matter what age you're, right? Yeah. So he, when Zach was coming, he said, can I come and, and interview Noam? And I thought, my son loves him. So I'd go in and say to Noam, you're going to interview with Zach Diller. Wonderful band. And I talked to him as if he didn't understand any of this. And at one point I brought up Bad Religion or something because I was talking to Greg Graffin at the time as well. And he said, and Noam said, I believe there's monographs that they interviewed me for. So there's one group that had some, some ongoing newsletter thing that Noam had written for. And so he, sometimes I think he plays dumb about that stuff. He knew. He knew a lot about these bands. Chumbawamba has something on them. So there were quite a few. Yeah, but when Zach came and my son got to meet him afterwards, and it was just the most fun thing. And I miss that. I miss the most fun things.

**Bob Bezinko:** And Tom Morello could talk to you as his mom.

**Bev Stohl:** He called me mom for a couple of weeks. Too bad I can't find his. If you have his e-mail, send it to me. I want to send him the book.

**Scott Parkin:** He never responds to us. We've emailed him.

**Bob Bezinko:** Yeah.

**Bev Stohl:** My son thinks he can find him, so I'll let you know if I do. Come on, Tom. Are you out there somewhere?

**Bob Bezinko:** Yeah. We live out of one, too. Yeah.

**Bev Stohl:** He's very political, Tom. His father, I think, was political, his mother. But he comes from a really honest background. He's a wonderful guy. And this was going to be his first interview. He wanted to interview Noam and posted on NPR. and he did and he was nervous and I loved that it's all right Tom I know you're famous and all that but just calm down.

**Bob Bezinko:** I think one of Noam's most famous interviews was with Ali G which you want to just kind of point to that because I realized I know the way Ali G operates but I got a sense that Noam kind of knew he was and he was in on it too.

**Bev Stohl:** We did not. I don't know how. I spent a lot of time trying to figure this out. In fact, he gave an interview years later at MIT, and I called him and said, who's his agent? I need to find something out. I need to find out how he got in. He had to lie to us. Of course. We always take people at face value. Unfortunately, that's backfired a few times. This was one of those times. And LEG came in. Honestly, was I in the bathroom? Was I walking the dog? I don't remember him coming in a gold suit, but I do remember Gnome coming out afterwards saying, Bev, which is how he started every single sentence to me. Bev, no more men in gold suits. LEG came in and it was so embarrassing for him, I would think, but Gnome played it straight. I think.

**Bob Bezinko:** Yeah.

**Bev Stohl:** Despite Allie G's efforts to make Noam look foolish, I don't think he did. He did ask him, how many words does you know? And what is some of them? And Noam said, we're using them right now. Oh, I wish I could talk to Allie G just.

**Bob Bezinko:** For- I remember seeing that and just falling on the floor laughing. It was really brilliant.

**Bev Stohl:** Yeah, I've seen it about eight or ten times myself.

**Scott Parkin:** Yeah. Sasha Baron Cohen was Ali G, right? So did they ever do a follow up? Did they ever reach out back to you again or did they just disappear after that?

**Bev Stohl:** I don't think they could have pulled that off twice. But who knows? Sally G, he's Sasha Baron Cohen. He can pretty good at pulling things off.

**Bob Bezinko:** Yeah.

**Bev Stohl:** But they never came back as far as I know.

**Bob Bezinko:** But wasn't it also true that, I think you alluded to it earlier, no one would actually have school kids from Boston come in and he would give them priority over a lot of these celebrities.

**Bev Stohl:** He loved it. Yeah. We'd rent the outside hall room in the student area and they'd all sit at the table. Sometimes they just sat in his office if they were happy, they'd sit on the floor, sit on the shelves, and just ask him questions. And he just loved

that. He loved that they were thinking. The thing Gnome liked the most was not, hey, Gnome, what should I do? The question he wanted to hear was, hey, Gnome, we're doing this. What do you think? This is what we're thinking. We just want to know what you think about what we're doing, not what should we do.

**Bob Bezinko:** When we had him, I know Scott was actually in grad school time, and so we had get together with just the students who would help organize it. And he's did seem like at ease and really like he was enjoying that. There were some other people in Houston who I think made his life difficult, but but I know and ours. Yeah. But I know Scott and others, they still today talk about it. Whatever the pictures come out, it's just everyone's eyes light up, their face lights up. No.

**Bev Stohl:** I'm trying to remember that. When did that happen?

**Bob Bezinko:** 2002 in October.

**Scott Parkin:** It was like, yeah, the fall.

**Bev Stohl:** Maybe you can send me a little clip of that. I'd love to see.

**Bob Bezinko:** I can send you the speech. We have it up on the thing.

**Bev Stohl:** Great, great.

**Bob Bezinko:** But yeah, but it just, everybody lit up and he just looked different there when he was in that room than later that night when he spoke in front of only 500 people and you had long-winded questions and people like me introducing him, making speeches that were probably longer than his.

**Bev Stohl:** Yeah, no, the younger the better. He loved students no matter what age, but he also lit up around children. He loved to tease them and make up stories. The story about putting a stick, the kids would go to bed if they had company on the Cape and they'd put, he'd put, they'd put sticks in the sand. He'd say, put some sticks in the sand. And then he, when they were asleep, he would replace the sticks with little limbs. So it looked like they had, try to convinced the children that the sticks had grown. No, they didn't. That's just who did that. No, I didn't do that. We were always playing tricks on his on his grandchildren. One grandson they had an argument about baseball and Noam tried to tell him that, what was his name? Roy Halliday.

**Bob Bezinko:** Yeah.

**Bev Stohl:** I think was this famous person. And his grandson kept saying, no, he's not. He's not. He said, yes, he is. I even have a signed baseball by him. And so Noam had me buy a baseball and I had to look up this guy's signature and forge it on the baseball. His grandson.

**Bob Bezinko:** He mentioned that a few times. He was a baseball fan. He told me his first game he'd ever seen was in Yankee Stadium where Joe DiMaggio was playing. He was like sitting in the outfit behind Joe DiMaggio.

**Bev Stohl:** Yeah, he was right there. He loved that. And you wouldn't know, you wouldn't think of Noam as being a sports fanatic because he can't fit it in. This is why I asked him, how come you're not a big animal advocate? And he said, because I can't fit people. There's so many people I can't even. So people sometimes think, how come he doesn't speak out about this or that, animals or anything or a lot of other

things? But he does. He does. He just can't. You can't spread yourself that thin. He was overwhelmed with the people part of it.

**Scott Parkin:** In the book, you talk about laughing through tears, which I think it's around the topic of how we acknowledge and deal with the absurdity and the grief of everything that's happening to us in the world or what's happening in the world. And Nome was deeply involved in lots of things going on in the world and writing on it and speaking on it and that sort of thing. How did he laugh through the tears? How did he deal with this sort of state of what's off in the state of the world? It feels particularly bad now, but looking back on the 70s and 80s and 90s, just as bad.

**Bev Stohl:** Yeah, I know. I know. It always feels worse now, too. But I spent a lot of time. I'm not going to give myself a lot of credit here, but I'm going to say that I spent a lot of time thinking, why me? Why was I in that position? Why? What was it about Mike? Did it make a difference that I was there rather than Joe Schmo or anyone else? And then I thought back about how many times we joked about things, although there's a second side to that as well. So I I had a sense of humor. He knew I had done a little stand-up comedy. He knew that I was into humor. And so I think he played upon that. And I made him laugh a number of times. He'd send me something and it wouldn't make any sense. Or I thought I sent him something. And then I wrote him to say, oh, no. Nor what I just sent you. And then I realized I hadn't sent it. So I wrote him again and said, ignore what I wrote you about ignoring what came before. And we had this whole conversation. He said, can you ignore something if you've never? So we got into this whole fun gnome ish conversation and he wrote back and said, it's things like this that brighten a gloomy day. And so I gave that some thought because there were so many times when I'd see him just looking coming in the door, just looking sad, overwhelmed, just feeling the world. And I would do something. He would literally, and his face would light up. And I thought, if I could stop him from one day of pain, if I could stop him from a moment of pain, then I didn't live in vain, not to quote something like the Bible, but it felt good to make him laugh. And I think also my dog, sneaked into his office during a very important filmed interview about Israel and Palestine. And I heard a clanging sound, which only could mean that she was looking for food in his trash can. And I thought, oh no. So I went in there and I crawled inside. I crawled in the office and I watched the dog again, Roxy just clang at the thing. And I pulled her out and I shut the door and he came out afterwards and he said, Bev. And I said, Oh, he's going to fire me. That's terrible. I can't believe my dog did that. This isn't great. And he looked at me and said, Is there any more coffee? And I said, What? You're going to let me get away from that? He said, I heard some commotion, but he said, You know what? We need the comic relief around here. We need that comic relief. So I thought, Okay.

**Bob Bezinko:** Years ago, I had an e-mail with a little quote from The Simpsons on it. It was a Homer. saying maybe Lisa has a point about America being the land of democracy. Maybe a deal has a point about the machinery of capitalism being oil with the blood of the workers. And I said that, but I had it like it was an e-mail with

a question or something. He writes back really quickly and he says, did they really let Homer get away with saying that on TV? And he was laughing. He got a kick out of that. He didn't answer my question. He did later, of course. But he just was so tickled. And then I interviewed him last year for the masterclass thing. And we did like a section on, it was great, 6 hours. We did one of the sections on linguistics. We were talking about B.F. Skinner. And when we went to break, I said, on The Simpsons, the principal was named Principal Skinner after B.F. Skinner. And he was just like chuckling over that. He thought it was so funny.

**Bev Stohl:** I hadn't realized that, but it's funny. Everything that you're bringing up, it's making me very happy because of the slideshow that I'm just putting together for these people in a community where they all have to do a certain amount of credits of education. And they're all in their 70s, 80s. And I also put in The Simpson, there's a cartoon And it says there's a grinder pizza place and it's called Chomp Skis. It shows Homer Simpson and then you have Gnome holding his two briefcases. And I could, my God, there's Gnome. And people started sending it to us. It didn't say specifically that it was Gnome, but you could see that it was Gnome. It was hysterical. Well, the onion.

**Bob Bezinko:** The Onion did a piece on him one time. Like, Noam Chomsky just wants to have an easy day where he could eat a suit kind of thing.

**Bev Stohl:** He was actually on a swing, a wooden swing, enjoying and not reading. That's how I knew it was a lie. I'm not seeing him without a piece of reading in his hand.

**Bob Bezinko:** Yes.

**Scott Parkin:** In the book, you have lots of great stories about Noam, but I also know that an editing process that they probably cut things out. I'm wondering if there's anything that you had wanted in the book, but then had to cut because the editors had said, this has to be X amount of words or whatever.

**Bev Stohl:** Yeah, I'm asked that question a lot. And I actually wrote down a bunch of answers, which I don't happen to have on me right now. But I can tell you that one of the most wonderful things about working with him was the the older guys that worked with him. Louis Kampf, who started resist with him. He was a founder of resist. Do you know what that is? Resist illegitimate authority. And a bunch of other people, Wayne just a lot of wonderful people that worked with him, Jake Kaiser, and they were just, I think they helped also keep his spirits up. Whenever they were in his office, they were laughing, they were joking and they were connecting. And because he didn't hang out at home, he wasn't a party guy. So I wanted to write all about them, but of course, it wasn't their book. And most of them died except for Jay Kaiser and Noam. And that was very difficult for all of us. And in fact, after I retired, I would write Noam and say, I'm sorry about Hilary Putnam. I'm sorry to hear about Marcus Raskin. By the way, I think his son should run for president. But by the way, and Noam agreed, I think I would have written a lot more about those guys, about his pals at MIT. Yeah.

**Bob Bezinko:** You clearly had a strong relationship with him, but what you might actually be a little modest about. Do you want to talk a little more? Because he gets involved with your whole family. You travel with him. I think you were just an administrative assistant. There was a lot more to it, and that must have been amazing for you as well.

**Bev Stohl:** Yeah. Again, you're being a little bit of a psychic here because that's the feedback I got on my slideshow. I'm downplaying the fact that he and I were very close.

**Bob Bezinko:** Yeah.

**Bev Stohl:** I remember we were in an airport. We were in the airport going to or coming back from Ireland, I think, and he spilled coffee on the table and you can see him just looking so embarrassed. And he said, this is what happens when you hang out with an old man. And I could have burst into tears. I really could have. There's several things that have happened over the years with him at Morris, and I really could have just cried. And so to prove him wrong, Laura, my partner, a few minutes later, spilled her. We had a good laugh about that. And then later, Laura spilled a drink. I believe it was Laura, but they made-up a whole joke about how when I left the table, I did it and the drink, I did it with my coat and my, the drink was spinning and it wasn't until I went over there to pay the bill that the drink fell. So it wasn't either of them. But also I think more seriously, when Carol passed away, I, he, I won't get into anything personal here with him because he was, of course, heartbroken. He had a lot of regrets. He had a lot of just the sadnesses that you have when you lose somebody. I'd look at the, he gave me a, he said, all the pictures that we have, could you cut me out and just frame Carol? I want her around. So I did that. And when he doubted that he was a home enough, did I have too much to do in my work? Was I too busy? I'd say, look at her. You even told me, Gnome, that she was supremely happy. Look at her. How can you be supremely happy if you're not happy at home? And she was fulfilled and You were a great person, always a wonderful family man. So I found myself holding him out there and some other times too.

**Bob Bezinko:** Well, what was it like traveling with him abroad? Like you went to the Vatican, right?

**Bev Stohl:** We went to the Vatican and of course, every time we traveled with him at the Vatican, any Catholic college, he would talk about abortion. He would talk about divorce. He would just throw it in their faces. And he would have breakfast that morning. No matter what he was planning to talk about, he would, we didn't know this. He's very sneaky, but he'd run it by Laura and me and start talking about something and see how we reacted. And I don't know if that affected what he'd say later or informed it in any way, but he and he was great. He was fun. In fact, after my mother died, we traveled with him and I was very afraid to go. I was just so emotional. We were going to Cork, which is where her grandmother, who she grew up with, had been born and I was very nervous about going, but we went and Noam took me in a pub crawl and he was just so supportive. And at the end of it, Laura and I wrote a

limerick from he was, they made him fly first class and he was older. He wasn't, he couldn't get in those little seats. And we sent it with the the flight attendant to the front of the plane. The little limerick we wrote about him and he came back waving it. We have to save this. We have to save this. Yeah. So traveling with him was just one. We were talking to these, these priests, these high priests who worked for the Vatican where we were staying and, and Noam was just, they pulled some fruit over and Noam said, they said, it's ripe. And Noam said, the fruit's not ripe. What is it then? And it was just like all these wordplay things. And he made me talk about the dog. And he said, yeah, sometimes we have Roxy answer my emails when I asked him how many emails he had. And I thought he's had, he could talk about anything in the world with these guys. And he's talking about my answering emails, but he that playful side of him, I believe was important for him. I think it probably kept him nourished. I can't imagine if he didn't play. with the children and with me and my sense of humor. And I also realized years later that his joining in to my humor was a way for him to soften everything that I was seeing every day. Kids with their limbs blown off or whatever horror I was looking at because I intercepted all of his mail. I think he was trying to make sure that I to save my sanity. Yeah.

**Bob Bezinko:** How did you deal with the kind of More negative or nasty letters of the attacks. Were you afraid? Were you angry? Was it just stressful or?

**Bev Stohl:** Yeah, I do talk about that in the book as well.

**Bob Bezinko:** Yeah.

**Bev Stohl:** I, one day I did just had enough of it. I wanted to write back and say, leave him alone. You have no idea. You have, you're so off the mark. This guy is completely real. And so I walked into his office and I said no, how do you deal with these angry, horrible people that write you? And he said, do you get mad at a hurricane? I said, what? Do you get mad at a hurricane? And I said, I get upset if there's a hurricane. What do you mean? And so he sent me away and I came back again and I asked him a different way because I tried to trick him. Maybe he won't realize I'm asking the same. Of course, he always knew what I was doing. But he said, people are hurricanes. And he said, people are hurricanes. It's just like a weather. So I went for weeks wondering what he meant by that. And finally I wrote him a third way and he came back with you can't control this stuff. You can't control these people. You can't change them. You can't change the weather. You just have to ride out. And just like people and their anger, one person did send a very nasty virus. It was a nasty thing and we had to close down our system for half a day. just to clean it out. It was terrible.

**Bob Bezinko:** I don't know if this involved you or it probably did, but a package came in once and I guess they called the MIT police and stuff, and it was like some soup for Passover or something like that, or for Seders. Was that, were you or not? Was that, you got it or?

**Bev Stohl:** Are you talking about two different things? Maybe.

**Bob Bezinko:** Oh, maybe.

**Bev Stohl:** The matzo box that came in. That's it.

**Bob Bezinko:** Yeah.

**Bev Stohl:** Plus there was, during the time of the Unabomber, a big wrapped up in duct tape A piece of luggage came in and the woman, so I'll tell you that one. The woman came in from headquarters and said, don't anyone touch this. It's for Noam Chomsky. I'm sure there's something wrong with it. And she kicked it across the room for some reason. And we were all what? So they called the police. They came in, they took it away. It was just a hoax. But the other one was, Noam was away for a few days. in a box of the I'm sorry I'm not Jewish it's matzo crack matzo I say matzo which is not what it is bread or whatever they came in and it said six and it said washed from the time of planting so I thought wow these must be sacred but I was hungry so I opened the box and he wasn't around and I ate one and the next day I was hungry again and it was so good really for a horrible thing they were very plain but they it was calling to me I got it down the six down to two and a half and I kept changing the number of how many things were actually in this box and when he came in I I told him I'm sorry this is what I did I I apologize I hope I didn't do anything bad and he said wow watch time of planting and he went and just stood there like that the sense of humor was fun yeah anyway he forgave me for eating those.

**Scott Parkin:** One question I have, which is like, what do you see as his, what do you see as his legacy? He's just, I don't want to call him larger than life, but he's the best with a, arguably the most important intellectual living today. And he's like one of the all-time best-selling living authors at the moment. And I'm wondering from your perspective, where you worked with him so closely for so long and knew him so well, what do you see as some of the important part of his legacy?

**Bev Stohl:** I don't think he would want any of that to be it. I think he would want the truth to be always look for the truth, always find the truth. Compassion for other human beings was always at the forefront of anything he did. And it affected everything he did, everything he said, generosity toward others. Miss America, we always made fun of her because at the end, when we asked her what she wanted, she always said, and I want world peace. But that's what he wants. He wants world peace. And he wants it for the little guy wants it for the he wants it for all of us. And it doesn't matter what country he wants everyone to not be bombed, to not be living in fear to not have any kinds of terror in their lives. And I don't know how he's feeling right now, about everything that's going on. He's not in the public eye at the moment. But Certainly there are a million interviews that will address everything that's going on now. So it's not like his voice isn't out there.

**Bob Bezinko:** I think it's also telling. I've been listening to a lot of podcasts and interviews about the Gaza and especially Norman Finkelstein, but also Rashid Khalidi. All these people are saying, no one's not around right now talking about this. So it's up to us. To do it. And people sign off and says, it's like, he asks himself, okay, what would Todd be say about this?

**Bev Stohl:** WWCD. I've been, I've been answering a lot of questions on Reddit because I had done an AMA some time back. Yeah. And I think he would just tell people, just be active. You have to do something. I once had my granddaughter in my office and she asked him, what good did the, the walks, it was a women's, the women's, the march on the women and. She said, Why do we march? What does it do? And he said, Because it brings attention to the cause. He said, And you gotta keep trying. Never forget him doing that 'cause he's always doing that. When he meant something, his fist went up. He said, You gotta keep trying. You can't stop trying. And I think that's something that he would say to activists who, by the way, can be depressed. can be overwhelmed by their work. And that's one of the reasons, by the way, I wrote my blog. Once I started thinking that activists were reading and saying, wait a minute, Noam Chomsky has a boat. Maybe I don't have to burn out. And so I think it was important to show. Sorry, I'm getting ahead of myself. Nobody asked me a question, but here I go.

**Bob Bezinko:** No, it's fine. It's.

**Bev Stohl:** Yeah, it's important for people to know that he was a human being. He wasn't super.

**Bob Bezinko:** He eats eggs or eats an egg.

**Bev Stohl:** He eats egg.

**Bob Bezinko:** But like that, I've had that impression though. Like I said, I thought he was this like deity almost. Like I'm sure it embarrassed them when I, like when I first met him, I was gushing. He wrote me a letter of recommendation and he kept saying, this is probably going to hurt you. I was like, I don't care. I want you to do it. And it was funny because after that, he said, if you need any more poison pen recommendations, just let me know. So he wanted to help, but he also understood it was what he talked about. He remembered telling me he took his grandson, I think, to the garden to see the Celtics garden. And yeah, I think that was important for me because it is easy to burn out and think, oh, I can never be like that. You can't be like him, but still, you can operate in those waters.

**Bev Stohl:** And I probably bought the tickets to the Celtics.

**Bob Bezinko:** Yeah. Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Bev Stohl:** Yeah. No, he has to, he had to. He did go out on the boat. He did garden. He did do things, but he only slept four or five hours.

**Bob Bezinko:** Yeah.

**Bev Stohl:** Even when he watched, I think it was Jeannie with the kids, he was watching little shows like that once in a while. It was a family. When the girls were little, I don't know if Perry was around yet, but he would be watching TV with them, but he'd be going like this. And they'd say, are you watching or are you writing a paper or are you writing a letter? And he'd say, no, I'm just moving my hands.

**Bob Bezinko:** Did you have a- before we go, I want to ask you about your linguistic ability to speak backwards. But I don't know if Scott has anything.

**Scott Parkin:** To– I had a second question, but I think that it was just answered right there.

**Bob Bezinko:** OK. So I don't mean to– if you're embarrassed, I'm sorry. But do you want to talk because I think it's fascinating. You talk backwards like you put the letters in the opposite sequence.

**Bev Stohl:** No, it's as if you play the sentence backwards, and you probably can do this now after I'm done, so I hope I don't screw it up, but you give me a sentence and I would play it as if it were being recorded backwards. So if I say something backwards, you should be able to record it forward and get a pretty accurate. I once did this with my brother who was an MIT student, a physicist, and he had a little program that could play it backwards and He showed me this jar of pills and it said, do not, well, whatever it said, I said it backwards and it came, it sounds like I'm from Mars, but it's fun. But if you want to give me a sentence, I'll try to say it backwards for you.

**Bob Bezinko:** Okay. Just, I'm Bev and I was Nome's assistant and I just wrote a book, something like that.

**Bev Stohl:** All right. So I'll say, I'm Bev Stoll. I was Nome's assistant and I've just written a book. Coupe, Natir, Sajj Vasvone. Zoe, I didn't have my I said I have. I didn't say Bev stole. Sorry.

**Bob Bezinko:** That's that's why that's it's just it's just in your brain from you. But no, you're proving him right about language being organic. Right.

**Bev Stohl:** So I was a very bored kid. I don't know if I would. It's not practice. It's not even something. It's just something intuitive. That's what I mean.

**Bob Bezinko:** No, I think on his point about the nature of linguistics, it was fate that brought you together, right?

**Bev Stohl:** Maybe. I'd like to think so. The Sufi thought I would never have regrets. The Sufi who came into my office 20 years ago said, you won't have any regrets. And I don't have any regrets. a wild and wonderful ride. And I feel so fortunate that I was somehow pushed into this. I don't know how it happened, but I'm really happy that it did.

**Bob Bezinko:** I don't know if Scott has anything else, but you can tell us also about the book and how to get it and what you're working on now, all that kind of stuff.

**Bev Stohl:** Oh, me want me to say? Yeah.

**Bob Bezinko:** Yeah. Just talk a little bit about if you get the book and if they want to follow you and what else you're doing, promote yourself a little bit.

**Bev Stohl:** Yeah. I wish I'm just finally putting together a website, but you can find me on Instagram, Chomsky and me. You can find me on Facebook, Chomsky and me. Or you can get in touch with me there. I'll be happy to talk to people. I text people and e-mail people all the time. So yeah, the book is In a lot of bookstores, it turns out if you go to a bookstore and it's not there, you have to ask for it. Yeah, Chomsky and me. And let's see, I'm doing a lot of events around, which I do post on a blog, which is [bevstoll.blogspot.blogspot.com](http://bevstoll.blogspot.blogspot.com), I see.

**Scott Parkin:** And we'll put it in the show. We'll put it in the show notes too.

**Bev Stohl:** Thank you. Thank you.

**Scott Parkin:** Yeah. I already put, and I already put, I already actually have it in the list to put in the show notes.

**Bev Stohl:** Okay, great. Thank you. Thank you.

**Bob Bezinko:** And we have a fairly extensive Chomsky playlist for our podcast because he's been a guest several times. And so we'll certainly delightfully add this to it, which I'm looking forward to. It was just like I said, I spoke to you for the first time, probably 25 years ago, I don't know, 20 years ago. And your name, I think so many of us know your name. So it's really cool to be able to see that you're a gnome, actually, a real person, not just this. You are kind of a larger than my figure in your own way. And I know.

**Bev Stohl:** Everyone says, Bev Stoll, I know that name. And so I'm afraid of her. I'm afraid of Bev Stoll.

**Bob Bezinko:** I know when he came out, you, the last time I talked to you before he came out, I don't know if he wasn't, if he'd had a cold or something, you, maybe Carol had told you to tell him not to take questions or something like that. And I remember after. Yeah, but I think you were, I think you even said Carol said, and I went up to him after it was, after he spoke and I said, Carol and Bev said that you need to take it easy. You shouldn't take questions. He just shushed me away.

**Bev Stohl:** That's a whole other podcast. If you want me on again, I'll tell you how many times Noam pretended that he was all of the rules and how many times he didn't. Yeah, so that's a longer story, but yeah, that's Noam.

**Bob Bezinko:** You're welcome back anytime. And this is one of our favorite things. And I just, it's delightful. And he's so important to so many of us. And you were just there and you were, you helped make this all possible too. You were a big factor in making this all possible. So we're really looking forward to talking with you and this has been really delightful.

**Bev Stohl:** So I'd love to come back. I'd love to come back and talk about him some more.

**Bob Bezinko:** I'll tell you what, maybe we can send you a green and red hat and you could wear it, promote us a little bit, okay?

**Bev Stohl:** I don't look good in hats. It's in the book. But yes, I will wear that.

**Bob Bezinko:** Yeah, I'm going to do a little bit of promo just briefly, but if any of you out there are interested, because look at the great shows we have on Bev stole. This is fantastic. But for \$25, you can give you a red hat. For 35, you get a copy of my first book, which actually Noam mentioned when he was interviewed a couple of times after it came out. He said, there's a new book out by this guy. So that was a big kick. But \$25 for the hat, 35 for the book and help us continue to have amazing guests like Bev on.

**Scott Parkin:** Yep.

**Bev Stohl:** Thank you. I hope you both had fun. Oh, absolutely.

**Bob Bezinko:** Absolutely. Yeah.

**Scott Parkin:** And folks out there in the audience, if you like what you're hearing, check us out on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. If you're watching this on YouTube, hit the subscribe button. If you're listening to us on an audio platform, give us a rate and review as it helps us with the algorithms. And if you really like us, go to [greenredpodcast.org](http://greenredpodcast.org) and hit the support button or become a patron at [patreon.com/greenredpodcast](http://patreon.com/greenredpodcast). And to get a hat or a book, e-mail us at [greenredpodcast@gmail.com](mailto:greenredpodcast@gmail.com) and we'll get right back to you. We've been selling hats, so please check them out and get a hat or a book. And Bev, it's been really great talking with you today.

**Bev Stohl:** You guys are doing great stuff. Thank you so much for everybody, all of your viewers, all of your subscribers. Really good stuff. I appreciate being on your show.

**Scott Parkin:** Yeah. And everyone else out there misbehave, and we'll talk to you again soon.

The Ted K Archive

“Chomsky and Me: A Memoir” ... Bev Stohl’s quarter-century as Chomsky’s  
administrative aide (G&R 277)  
March 6, 2024

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=5DxHaYmiWkM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5DxHaYmiWkM)

“In 1996 Ted Kaczynski’s brother turned him in, and Noam’s writings were found taped to his cabin walls. They had briefly crossed paths at Berkeley in the mid sixties, when Noam was visiting faculty, a fact he revealed to me when an FBI agent questioned me, looking for ties between Noam and Ted. I suppose Noam had kept this quiet as a way to protect me. A decade later, a friend of Kaczynski’s activist mother asked Noam to call her on her eighty-ninth birthday. During the call, I was witness to Noam’s empathy and kindness.” —Chomsky and Me by Bev Boisseau Stohl

**[www.thetedkarchive.com](http://www.thetedkarchive.com)**