

HOPE OZER
NOVEMBER 18, 2022

Catherine: Today's date is November 18, and I am interviewing Hope Ozer. May we have your permission to quote you in part or all in our conversation today?

Hope: Of course!

Catherine: This interview will be available on the Town's website, and it becomes a public record.

Catherine: What brought you to Arizona and particularly to Paradise Valley?

Hope: My loving husband was a partner at Arthur Andersen. In 1984, when Arizona was booming, the firm needed someone with Jay's skill set to head up the audit practice in Phoenix and asked us to relocate. All I knew about Phoenix was that it was hot, and I said, "How soon can we get there?" There was no question in my mind that we would love to live here. After extensive research in the library (pre-internet), Paradise Valley came up as hands down where we would want to live in the metro area: open spaces, large lots, easy access to the downtown (pre-freeways), excellent schools.

Jay and I had both lived most of our adult lives in New York and New Jersey. I traveled internationally in my role as Assistant Manager of Public Relations and Advertising for El Al Israel Airlines in New York. Jay was a partner with Arthur Andersen, and likewise traveled considerably. It kept our marriage fresh!

When the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act was passed, exposing members of US boards of directors to potential liabilities, boards wanted to be assured that their international businesses were in compliance. So, in 1976, Arthur Andersen transferred us to Cali, Colombia for Jay to head up that practice. Cali was a major international city within the Andean Pact countries and headquarters of many international companies: Bayer, American Home Products, Bank of America, Colgate, and Fleischman, among others. So, there was a significant expat community. We lived there for two years, and frequently traveled to Bogota on business for Jay – pleasure for me.

Cali sits just north of the equator, nestled about 3,000 feet above sea level in the western range of the Andes. It has a year-round temperate climate and lush landscape with wide open spaces, lots of air and sunshine. I called it "never-neverland." It was quite a magical place, and we were living an amazing life. Our home had six bedrooms and several living/entertaining spaces plus staff quarters with multiple bedrooms. As was a typical lifestyle for expats, we had three live-in help: a cook, a gardener (who also washed the cars and cleaned the pool daily), and a housekeeper. A lake adjoining the uphill side of the property would waterfall into the lake behind the house. It was spectacular. When it rained, typically in the evening, rain would fall

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through the open-air skylight alongside the dining table (that comfortably sat 20) into a river rock channel that flowed out to the lake in the rear.

Our housekeeper Lorenza was deferential to a fault. If we had guests in the living room, and she needed to cross through to another part of the house, she would remain where she was until our guests had left, as it was considered impolite in her culture to cut through. Once I realized that, and with some cajoling, I broke her of that practice. We're American. As far as we're concerned, it's fine!

Jay was working making the "big bucks." As I was not permitted to work, I travelled, primarily to Ecuador, Peru, and the Colombian Amazon. I learned how to play golf, tennis, and bridge. Socially, we had several diverse groups of friends: Colombians, expats, and a prominent Jewish family who essentially adopted us. We belonged to two country clubs. The international Club Campestre of expats and affluent Colombians, and Club Shalom, the Jewish club. On occasion there would be a "show of force" by the army on the road to our home. So, we'd stop at Campestre for dinner, wait for it to clear, and head home. Our parents in Florida would read about it in the Miami Herald and be freaking out. There was really nothing to freak out about. It's just the way it was.

I visited small towns and villages, shooting photographs of locals which I developed in the room of our house that we had converted to a darkroom. Although generally I felt quite safe, I stopped wearing any jewelry when out and about due to opportunistic theft. In trafficked areas we'd drive with the windows rolled up (and with no air-conditioning!) lest being robbed when stopped at a traffic signal. Although not *everyone* stopped!

On Tuesdays, along with my cook, we'd go to a typical third world market, replete with fly covered beef hanging on hooks. Once you infused the tough-as-shoe-leather beef with a couple boxes of Lipton's Onion Soup and cooked the hell out of it, it wasn't half bad. When I came stateside on "home leave," I would buy dozens of boxes of Lipton's Onion Soup for that purpose. Also, who would've thought that onion soup dip would be considered a gourmet treat? There were three young boys who awaited us each Tuesday to "watch" our car. If they weren't paid to "watch" your car, they, or someone, would steal windshield wipers, hubcaps, side mirrors, and whatever else they could pop or unscrew.

The principal of the American School in Cali was active in helping international families with adoption of Colombian orphans. With her assistance I was able to help my friend in the States adopt a newborn. He was born on Easter Sunday, a most fitting time for a boy who was to be raised by a Catholic mother to be born. She named him Andrew. Upon Andrew's birth, an upholsterer moved into one of our spare rooms to fabricate bedding and bumpers for Andrew's bassinet. When we brought Andrew home, we hired a niñera to care for him. At that point, our house was pretty full.

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We were to have been in Colombia for three years. But my loving husband had accomplished in two what he had been sent there to do in three. I wanted to know, “Can’t you keep working on your golf game or something?” With his international expertise, the firm needed him back in New York. They ask. You go. I came back to New York, four months pregnant, kicking and screaming, saying, “I will go anywhere sunny and warm.” For the following six years, all I wanted was to get the hell out of New York!

Catherine: Where did you go after you left Colombia?

Hope: From 1978 to 1984, we lived in East Brunswick, New Jersey. Before we left Colombia, I had asked Lorenza if she would consider coming back to the States to help take care of the baby. She thought for a minute, got a smirk on her face and a mischievous sparkle in her eye. This the only time she was ever irreverent, and said, “I’ve never done anything exciting in my life. And besides, you can’t take care of a baby without my help!” We submitted a visa application for her the day we arrived in the States. It took 19 months and two trips for me to the embassy in Bogota to get it done. Lorenza arrived with her green card one month before Courtney’s first birthday!

Catherine: She didn’t move with you right away?

Hope: No. When we left Colombia, she moved in with one of my friends. I remember dealing with the immigration office in Trenton, New Jersey. The woman there said to me, “Do you have the exact name of where she was born?” I said, “I know she was born in Huila. Beyond that, I don’t know.” She said, “Well ask her.” Lorenza had gone back to Huila. There was only one phone in her little town. I said, “The amount of time it’s going to take to mail her a letter and receive a reply....” The immigration lady said, “You mean she’s not already living with you?” I said, “No, she’s in Colombia.” She said, “Well that’s a first!”

When we lived in Colombia, we adopted a cocker spaniel puppy. Do you remember the Latin singer Charro – “Cuchi Cuchi”? This puppy would wiggle her hind end so much that we named her Charro. She was bilingual – she understood English and Spanish. She was really Lorenza’s dog. She slept with Lorenza. When we came back to the States, Charro came with us. When Lorenza ultimately arrived and we brought her home from the airport, Charro went berserk – she ran from one end of the house to the other end. Up and down the stairs. And back and forth again. It’s amazing how they remember. Charro was beside herself – and so was Lorenza. Charro was her baby.

Catherine: Did you go back to work when you came back to the States?

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Hope: I was working part time, but clearly being a “mommy.” My father had died a couple of years after Courtney was born. My mother was not doing well. She lived in Florida, so I was spending a lot of time flying back and forth.

Catherine: Tell me how you ended up in Paradise Valley?

Hope: In September 1984, we had to go to Dallas for Jay’s partner meeting. I said to Jay, “I’ll stop in Phoenix on the way to Dallas and then I’ll meet you in Dallas.” Jay said, “Phoenix is not on the way to Dallas.” I was a typical Easterner. The New Yorker’s version of the map of the United States is Manhattan, Hudson River, California! Nothing in between.

Before I flew out to Phoenix, I did some research on the schools and areas. Courtney was in first grade. We decided that Scottsdale School District was the best – preferably Cherokee, Cocopah and Chaparral. After commuting from New Jersey to New York where it was an hour and 45 minutes door to door, we were committed to not living further than a half hour drive from Jay’s office downtown Phoenix. This was before there was the 51 and the 101. It was just surface streets. Paradise Valley was where we wanted to live – to a great degree because of the open space.

Because Lorenza lived with us full time – we were her family. We needed a house where Lorenza could have her autonomy. She needed to be in the house but not *in* the house, her own studio apartment. Our New Jersey house had a finished basement, so she had her own apartment downstairs.

We saw a spec home with a sign on Kober just north of Doubletree. Kober was a dirt road with half a dozen old houses, mostly on 5-acre parcels. Everything between Kober and Invergordon was desert. A builder had purchased and subdivided a 2-1/2-acre lot on the east side of the street. He had built the spec home on one of the lots and had laid a foundation for another one just to the south of it.

Catherine: Did you buy the spec home?

Hope: No. It wasn’t configured for our needs. So, we met with the builder and told him what we were looking for. Because the other lot only had a foundation, he said several things could be altered including creating an apartment for Lorenza. During construction I traveled back and forth from New Jersey to keep an eye on things. Call me crazy!

When we moved to Arizona on December 19, 1984. the house was not ready. We rented a patio home on McCormick Ranch. As I knew we were going to be living on Kober, I enrolled Courtney at Cherokee. After drop-off every day, I stopped by the house to make sure they were putting the nails in the right places. The builder said he would have it move-in ready by

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February. Well, it wasn't. February came and we had to be out of the rental. Go try to find a rental here starting in mid-February during season. The few we found would either accept the child or the dog. Not both. We ultimately found one that fortunately would accept both.

In April, we were still in that rental and told the builder that he simply had to get it finished. He told us that he might have to file for bankruptcy. That he can't finish it. And asked if we would close on it while it's still not finished. And by not finished, I mean the kitchen had no cabinets. The entry foyer was concrete. Our road was still dirt. He had promised that he had arranged with the Town to pave the road. The landscape wasn't finished. We had legal papers drawn and bank letters of credit to close in case he defaulted.

We moved into the house – unfinished – in May. During the monsoon Kober was so deep with mud that it was like driving on ice. Our driveway and our garage were always coated with dirt. That's how I got involved in the Town. I was visiting Town Hall regularly to “encourage” them to get the lead out and pave our road.

Catherine: Were you the only family living on Kober and, if not, were the others complaining?

Hope: The spec house had been sold and someone was living in it. All the older homes where people had been living on a dirt road forever, didn't seem to care. There were a lot of challenges that I won't go into – but the house ended up being beautiful. We love it.

Catherine: When did Kober finally get paved?

Hope: It took about a year, maybe longer.

Catherine: How did you get on the Board of Adjustment?

Hope: Being a recent arrival, I regularly attended Town Council meetings to learn more about my new home. Because I was there seemingly all of the time, I was noticed! I believe it was Mayor Joan Lincoln who reached out and asked if I would serve on the Board of Adjustment. I was appointed in 1986. Serving on the Board of Adjustment was perfect because it gave me the opportunity to be involved in the Town and do something substantive without it being all-consuming. I believe that when people become involved in where they live – they take more of an ownership and care about it. I've served on the Board for 35 years, so I have a lot of historical knowledge. As long as I am reappointed, I will continue to serve. Paradise Valley is *my* town.

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Catherine: Does Jay volunteer for the Town?

Hope: Jay has served for five years thus far as a dedicated member of ACOPS, the Town's advisory committee on public safety.

Catherine: Did you ever consider running for Town Council?

Hope: I believe it was Bob Plenge who was mayor after Joan Lincoln, who had encouraged me to "move up" to Planning & Zoning or to run for Town Council. I was involved in several other things and felt I could not devote the appropriate amount of time. As to Town Council, I have no interest in running for public office. Jon Kyl, who at the time was in the US House of Representatives, encouraged me to run for the Arizona State Legislature. I considered it and realized that it was not what I wanted to do. I served briefly on the Maricopa County Planning and Zoning Commission, appointed by Don Stapley, who was on the County Board of Supervisors.

Catherine: When did you get involved with Courtney's school, the school board and then the State Legislature?

Hope: On Courtney's very first day of first grade, she came home with a flyer that the Superintendent of Schools was to be addressing Cherokee's Association of Parents & Teachers about the district's five-year facility master plan. I thought this was something I needed to learn about. After the superintendent's presentation, when he opened the floor for questions, I had several. Noticed again! A few weeks later, I was asked by the parent leadership if I would I take over as treasurer of the APT as the current treasurer had to step down. So, I was treasurer of Cherokee the last half of Courtney's first year and was elected treasurer the following year. During that year, I also served as the Cherokee Chair to Aid in the Passage of the School District Bond and Budget Override.

I was elected president when Courtney was in third grade. That was the year that Cherokee and Cocopah merged. Both Cherokee and Cocopah had been K-8 schools. They reconfigured them to make Cherokee the K-6 school and Cocopah the middle school. We had close to 1,000 children at Cherokee that year. During my presidency, I also chaired Cherokee's campaign to pass Prop 101 to amend the State Constitution to raise the aggregate spending limit on funding education.

It was during my time as president of Cherokee's APT, it became apparent to me that there were certain issues that the schools had no power to change. Certain changes could only be made at the district level. I started attending school board meetings on a regular basis. By attending the school board meetings, I realized that there were again things over which they had no authority. Control was held by the Legislature. So, in 1987, under the umbrella of

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Scottsdale Parent Council, I co-founded and co-chaired its Legislative Action Committee, to bring awareness of state controls of education and funding mechanisms, and to train parents as effective advocates on behalf of their children.

Next, we initiated the “Meet your Legislator Breakfast” for Scottsdale School District parents. Having started that, I became the second vice president of Parent Council in charge of Legislative Affairs. I was practically living at the Legislature – attending every Education Committee meeting, both house and senate.

I was elected president of Scottsdale Parent Council for the 1988-1989 school year while I also held the legislative responsibilities and was involved in many committees at the Scottsdale School District. I also served for several years as the only parent on the Joint Legislative Committee on Goals for Arizona’s Educational Excellence. Once Courtney was in middle school, I was on the APT board there, but I wasn’t involved to this degree anymore, although still involved in the legislative areas. In 1989, I co-founded the Parent Alliance for Legislative Awareness, a multi-school district parent coalition to train parents in legislative advocacy to lobby in support of education funding. I don’t think that exists anymore.

Catherine: Were you involved in the school bond elections?

Hope: Yes, I was very involved in school bond elections, all of the bond campaigns and the budget override campaigns. For the 1988 Bond and Override campaign we were told that it would be a piece of cake. Due to population shifts, schools were being built in the northeast 30-square-mile area and those in the south were being closed or somewhat neglected. We were a group of five or six parent volunteers. All that was required, we were told, was to go to the school parent organization meetings, present the facts, everybody would be in favor of it, and move on. When we spoke at the schools in the south, there was a lot of animosity. Clearly, this was NO piece of cake. I was surprised we didn’t get tarred and feathered and that nobody slashed our tires. After the Bond and Override passed, the committee chair provided each of us with a plaque – a machete mounted on a stained wooden board that reads, “It’s a jungle out there.” I still have it hanging in my office. It’s by far the best memento I ever received.

Catherine: How did you get involved in Valley Youth Theatre. Did your daughter enjoy acting?

Hope: I had given this kid lessons in everything known to man. She had lessons in tennis, bowling, jazz, golf, gymnastics, chess. Every time she was involved in something, once she got the outfit or equipment that went with the activity, she was done! But when Jay and I would come home in the evening, she would have transformed her bedroom into a theater. She had a costume box in her closet with old clothes and she would put together some cockamamie outfit. She would drag cardboard boxes in from the garage, drape them with old sheets and seat her stuffed animals as her audience. She created a show that we, along with the stuffed

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animals, were required to watch. So, we figured, O.K., we'll give her acting lessons. We sent her to a workshop program at the Arizona Academy of Performing Arts. They weren't doing mainstage productions, just performances for the parents to showcase what they had learned. Courtney was thriving. Then I got the call from the young woman who ran the program that they were out of funds and were closing their doors. Being I habitually go into rescue mode, I offered to help by raising some money. She said it was too late, they were done. So that was the end of that. That was the summer of 1989.

In September of 1989, that young woman called me. She had been hired to direct a show for a new theatre company called Valley Youth Theatre. Auditions and rehearsals were taking place at the Church of the Brethren at 23rd Street south of Indian School. She encouraged me to bring Courtney down to audition for their first production, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. I joke that there were 12 roles and 12 auditioners. Courtney was cast as Doc. As I would sit in the last pew of the church doing paperwork for things I was involved with, I realized that this was a one-man show. I invited the artistic director to breakfast and told him basically, "I see a lot of talent. I see a lot of commitment and passion. What I don't see is access to resources, influence in the community, and funding. You need to form a board of directors that can support you and help you. I've already seen one organization go under because they hadn't done that." He told me thanks but no thanks. I said, "I am not at all offering to do this." I had a really full plate. "But you need to find somebody to do this for you." That was the end of that. So then, because I tend to be obsessive and on autopilot when it comes to rescuing, I went home and wrote letters to 100 of my closest friends – people I knew through my other community involvement. My message was that there is a young theatre company that is vital to the community. It's important for children and they need funding and support. Please send money. I had Courtney stuffing the envelopes. I started receiving checks for \$10, \$25. I would send Courtney to rehearsal with an envelope and say, "Give this to the director." Then I went to Home Depot and asked for any paint that had been returned. They donated lumber and other materials. Meanwhile, Jay's office – they had a printing department – printed the flyers and the programs. VYT produced that first show at the JCC on 19th Ave and Bethany Home. The next production was *The Canterville Ghost*. Courtney was not cast. Not happy! This was a life lesson in learning to take rejection. She was asked to be on the tech crew. At first, she resisted. Ultimately, she loved it. By the time she was fifteen, she was a stage manager.

It was the summer of 1990 that the director approached me and, seeing that I was serious about helping, asked if I would put together a board. I was up for a new challenge. So, I gathered six people I knew from the Parents Alliance for Legislative Awareness to form the initial Valley Youth Theatre board of directors. Because of my involvement with school districts, I was able to garner cooperation to utilize several high school auditoriums for performances. Parents built the sets at the old East High at McDowell and 48th Street that had been closed. We also stored sets there for several years.

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After four years of that, in 1993, we obtained space in the old Tower Plaza Mall on Thomas and 38th Street. The mall had dozens of empty store fronts. We met with the management company saying essentially, “We are this wonderful theatre for children. We need 10,000 square feet of space to build a permanent home. And we can’t pay you anything.” At the time, Cigna in Connecticut owned Tower Plaza Mall. They said, “Yes, sure.” They offered us the basement of the mall. It was a disaster area and needed a lot of work. Karl Keierleber, whom I knew from our involvement in Scottsdale Leadership, was the fire chief at Rural Metro for the City of Scottsdale. I asked him for help. Karl enlisted the captains of two of the fire houses, who in turn gathered a crew of fire fighters. They did all the demolition and cleanup, built the risers and the stage, and wired the whole theater. All as volunteers. Contractors donated materials. We built a lovely 170-seat theater. In 1995, the year I was diagnosed with breast cancer, underwent a mastectomy and was undergoing chemotherapy, our director left. So, I managed the theatre for several months. Rescue mode is my middle name. Early in 1996 we hired a new artistic director who is still with VYT after 25 years.

Catherine: Does Valley Youth Theatre now have its own building?

Hope: Yes. Tower Plaza ownership had assured us that we would be included in their planned redevelopment. Then the property changed hands several times. Bottom line is VYT was not included in the ultimate redevelopment. We officed for a year in donated space at Trinity Cathedral in downtown Phoenix. While we were there, we spoke with over 300 property owners to find free space where we could build the theater. In 1998, we remodeled a run-down building at First Street and Fillmore in downtown Phoenix, which is where we are now. For that, Valley Youth Theatre received the DREAMR Award for taking a blighted building in the downtown and creating a vital cultural attraction.

Catherine: Wasn’t the D-Backs Stadium there by then?

Hope: Yes. In 1997, I was asked to serve on the Diamondbacks Foundation Board where I served for 17 years. The stadium was completed in 1998.

Catherine: And what was next for you?

Hope: Valley Youth Theatre was all grown up and had good leadership. My daughter was grown and gone. I wanted a new challenge. So, in 2002 I started a community newspaper, *TheTatumSunTimes*. A couple of years later we rebranded to *CITYSunTimes* due to extended readership. It was a monthly focused on local news that was available in racks and home delivered to residents in the Town of Paradise Valley, a large portion of Phoenix and Scottsdale and distributed widely up to Carefree, Cave Creek, and Black Canyon City. The editor who was responsible for content was my business partner. As publisher, I was responsible for the business side. I did write a monthly column – I would call it “Experiential Humor.” We also had

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several monthly columnists including an eye doctor, interior design professional and the superintendents of several school districts. The local mayors each wrote a column. We sold the paper in 2014 to a woman who subsequently sold it to a Midwest company that has been assembling small community papers. They retained my entire original staff. The paper still looks as good as or better than when I owned it.

In 2014, I started powerlifting as a competitive sport. I was setting state and national records in my weight and age class. We are not talking body building where you grease up in a bikini and pose. It's a strength competition. My deadlift record in training is 202 lbs.

Catherine: It sounds like everything you take on, you do so seriously.

Hope: I do – it's just who I am.

Catherine: Is your daughter like this?

Hope: Yes. After Courtney graduated from high school in 1996, she started at U of A on a full ride scholarship. After about two months, she wanted out of Tucson. She said, "I need to be in a big city. This is *not* working for me." She finished out the year with a 4.0 and did all the right things. She wanted to study at either NYU, University of Chicago, or Georgetown. She was accepted to all three and decided to go to NYU, transferring at the beginning of her sophomore year, living in Manhattan. She went on to Georgetown Law School and graduated with her J.D. in 2003. Courtney was an associate at two major New York City law firms and went on to become Associate General Counsel – Litigation at Unilever. Currently she serves as Chief Legal Officer & Corporate Secretary for LIVEKINDLY Collective, an international plant-based foods company with operations in South Africa, Europe, China, Australia, and the US. She has one daughter, Oakley, who is now fourteen, and calls me "Glammie."

Catherine: And we will finish with Jay – is he retired?

Hope: Yes. Jay retired from Arthur Andersen when he was fifty-seven. He formed his consulting practice as his next venture but cut back considerably when I sold *CITYSunTimes*. At this point, he does some consulting, participates in the Town on ACOPS, cycles, reads, and enjoys the fruits of his labor. He frequently flies to New York to "teen sit" when Courtney is traveling. Thanks to technology, we have dinner almost every evening with Courtney and Oakley via FaceTime.

Catherine: Hope, this has been wonderful interview. Thank you for your time.