

Tempe: Distinct, Diverse, Dynamic

Living Together

Voices from Tempe

Fifth Grade Program of the Tempe History Museum

Voices from Tempe

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These are excerpts from oral histories (tape recorded memories) of Tempe residents. Tempe is the most diverse city in the Valley.

These oral histories are stories from three diverse groups:
Mexican-Americans, African-Americans, and Japanese-Americans.

Understanding the Voices...

For each of the three stories, here are some suggestions to help you better understand what the people from each ethnic group are saying in their stories:

Read the stories.

Share the information from the stories with your classmates and friends.

Answer these questions:

What is diversity?

Why did these adults want to tell us about their experiences?

What role do you think ASU has had in making Tempe the most diverse city in the Valley?

Discuss when Tempe has treated its citizens well and when it has not.

Being a good historian, you should start your research with a question you want to answer on your trip through the *Living Together* section of the museum.



photo credit: Tom Story

The Mexican-American voices

Irene Hormell: My name is Irene Hormell, and I remember attending the old Eighth Street School where Tempe Center now stands. My mom also went to that school. It was just for Mexican kids. She was made fun of for being left-handed.

Josie Ortega Sanchez: Some of the teachers did not like Mexicans and scolded us for speaking Spanish or saying words incorrectly in English. That made me ashamed.

Irene Hormell: Oh yeah, I remember being spanked many times for speaking Spanish in school. It was not allowed. One time I even had to do it in my pants as a little girl because I could not communicate with the teacher. They sent me home. That was a very hard time in my life.

Pablo 'Paul' Amado Chavarria: Mmm hmmm and we had all those used books while the white kids at Tenth Street School had new ones, so we were 1-2 years behind them.

Irene Hormell: Mexican-American students like Pablo, Josie, and I, had to try twice as hard because we had to learn a foreign language (English) and keep up with all the white students. Our families spoke to us and read stories in Spanish at home. I used to answer my grandmother, Doña Marina, in English, but she told me: "You'd better read Spanish, write it, and use it. Be proud of what you are, be proud of your culture, and be proud of being an American."

Pablo Chavarria: Not all of our experiences at school were bad though. I remember one teacher, Mrs. Elizabeth Hampton, fondly. She took extra time, motivated me, and has been a role model for me ever since.

Irene Hormell: Once I left the old Eighth Street School and went to the Catholic school, Mount Carmel, I learned so much more, even more than those kids at the Tenth Street School. They taught us about art and culture, authors, public speaking, and even Latin. We learned a lot of things that helped us later. I think some of the bad experiences we had in school made us stronger, and we sure did form a close bond.



The 1944 First Grade class at the 8th Street School in Tempe

Remember: What do these adults want us to know about their growing up in Tempe?

I'm **Mary Bishop**. And I'm **Earl Oats**.

We've lived in Tempe for over 40 years. Our experiences have been much the same.

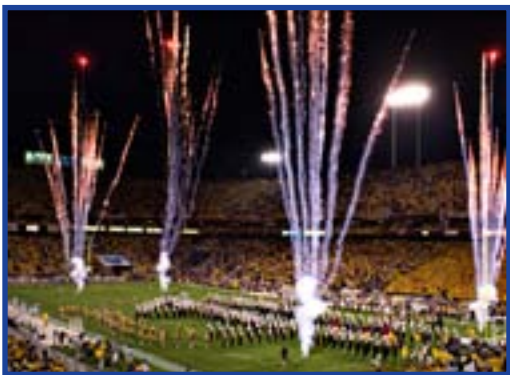
Earl Oats: I went to Tempe High in 1953. It was being integrated at that time. I participated in sports and to this day there are people that I went to school with that I talk to periodically. It was a good school. I had a good experience.

Mary Bishop: I always admired Tempe; I thought it was a beautiful little city. But my husband and I didn't move to Tempe until 1967. Hallcraft Homes was the only one who would sell black folk homes. . . . Tempe has always been, until recently, a lily-white city. I've always done everything I needed to in Phoenix. I belonged to Phoenix social clubs, a Phoenix church, and I taught in Phoenix. We're not actually excluded in Tempe, but people have a way of being nice to you and not wanting you around.

Earl Oats: There are "incidents" like name-calling and whatever, but those are individuals, never the city. We had little of that. We gave the individuals little opportunity to marginalize or exclude us because we carried ourselves like professionals.

Mary Bishop: Tempe is opening up. We have our first black city councilman, Mr. Woods, Corey Woods. We have black policemen and teachers. They are hiring more. I can remember when there were no black folk on the police force. Hiring gives you a clue to everything. Fry's has a black man. He's the manager and he greets people as they come in.

Earl Oats: Our neighborhood is safe and quiet. Our kids played with the other children in the neighborhood and we adults would wave as we went to work or came home. Tempe, in my mind, is one of the best places in the world to raise a family.



Mary Bishop: I'm proud of Tempe. I don't mind saying I live in Tempe, Arizona. Home of Arizona State University. I like saying that best when they have winning football teams! (laughs)



Earl Oats



Mary Bishop

What about their personal and public lives do these people want us to know?

The Japanese-American voices

Christine Kajakawa Wilkinson: When I grew up there were only two Japanese American families in Tempe. My family, the Kajakawas, and the Nakatsus. What we did with our families was quite different because Rose Nakatus' family had a vegetable farm. My father taught at ASU so much of what we did centered around the university. We both, though, had similar experiences during World War II. The United States was at war with Japan, Germany and Italy. A law was passed that said a number of places were "military areas" and especially the Japanese were barred from going there – even if they were American citizens, as we were. Many Japanese were put in camps. In Tempe we couldn't go into the area around the University. My family moved so we wouldn't have to go the internment camps and my father joined the army.



*Christine Kajakawa
Wilkinson*



Rose Nakatsu

Rose Nakatsu: My family lived outside the restricted area, but we couldn't get to the shops. Kind neighbors had to help us get the necessities we needed. All the children in my family changed their clothes when they came home from school and then went out into the fields to help our father. He was very quiet and kind. He told me old Japanese fables as I steered the tractor in the field. We had mostly homemade toys. My sisters and I played marbles with our older brother. We would spin tops, make sling-shots and sometimes coax our brother into letting us try his BB gun. We were kind of tomboys, but those were joyful times for us.

Christine Kajakawa Wilkinson: I remember going to my grandparents' home in Glendale when I was very young and picking strawberries and melons, but one of my fondest memories is walking down Mill Avenue with my grandfather when I was a very small child. Tempe was a very small town then and a lot of people knew each other and looked out for each other. We celebrated each other's achievements, but we knew we were part of a larger being with the University. My father was a professor and coach at ASU. My mother in particular was a very social person and was dedicated to the community. My mother always, always had people over – entertaining them. Lonesome students ended at our house. I don't ever remember a major holiday when we didn't have 10, 20 people for dinner, all day or all weekend. We always had some kind of extended family, my grandparents, or uncle, with us, too. We played board games, card games, puzzles – jigsaw, crossword. It was always fun. Tempe was a wonderful place to be.

How are these voices different from the others? How are they the same?