



**Coy Payne**  
**Mayor of Chandler: 1990 - 1994**

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By: Jean Reynolds

Public History Coordinator

JR: What is the name of your father and where was he from?

CP: My father's name is Scott Payne. He is from Sulphur Springs, Texas. He was born in that community, of course, many years ago.

JR: What kind of work did your father do?

CP: My father was a farm worker, sharecropper, if you will, because that's the kind of work that he would be involved in, he didn't just work for people, he worked for himself to an extent. The extent was that he farmed land that belonged to the major landowner on half of what he grew on the farm part that he had. The landowner, of course, received the other half. So he was called a sharecropper.

JR: What year did your father bring your family to Chandler?

CP: In January 1942 we left Texas for Arizona. In the dead of winter, very cold, in a semi-tractor trailer rig; there were about five to seven families in the back of that rig. We were one of those seven families.

JR: What was it that brought you to Arizona?

CP: My dad had aspirations to have a better life for himself and his family. He was a little bit disappointed that he was not making as much or having as much success at what he was doing in Texas as he wanted to have. He would have liked to own his own farm and do his own work for himself but that was not going to be the case and he realized that so he became disillusioned with the sharecropping thing and decided, well, I'll look for something better. He had a brother that had retired from the military after WWI, he used to live in Phoenix, well he was in contact with his brother and he was always telling him that this is where he should come, you should come to Arizona, things are better here. They don't treat you in a segregated fashion out here in fact your kids would be able to go to the same schools the white kids go to. So why don't you come out. My dad listened to that for a number of years then he decided finally after picking cotton across west Texas into New Mexico into southern Arizona, he contracted with a rancher down in southern Arizona, they made a deal for him to come back to Texas and gather some cotton pickers for the farmer because he was in need of it because the war was going on now and most of the young help was gone in the military. So dad came back and in the process of coming back he bought the semi-tractor trailer and we loaded up and ended up in southern Arizona.

JR: What was the name of your mother?

CP: Virgie May Stribling.

JR: Where was she from?

CP: She was from the same community that my dad was. They were both born and grew up in that community they started their adult lives there.

JR: Did she work outside of the home?

CP: Yes, in fact she was a field worker too, she worked on the farm. She shared the farming chores with my dad and us children as soon as we were old enough or strong enough or big enough to do some of the work.

JR: Your family came to Eloy with the other farm workers in 1942, right?

CP: Yes.

JR: What was it that brought you in to Chandler?

CP: After our brief interlude in the cotton camp at Eloy from January to March, we had been dropped from the school law in Texas, so for the children in Arizona there was a compulsory school law. You had to be in school until you were 16 or passed the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. So the law said we had to be in school. That was one reason. The other reason was my dad's aspiration was that all of his kids should be educated and get as much education as they could. In fact in Texas he had been on the school board, so he understood the workings of the school. We picked cotton from January to March and in March, Dad decided, well, we better move to a place where we can get the kids in school. So he came up to Chandler and talked to a rancher here in Chandler and they had an agreement that the rancher would come and get his family and bring the family up to the rancher's ranch here in Chandler, and dad would work for him and not have to pay any rent. So that agreement worked, and we now had enough money to purchase a car, so he bought a family car, a 1929 Model A Ford, and he loaded all of us in that Ford with all our belongings except for me. I rode with the rancher who had come down to pick us up - I rode in his nice new pickup.

We came to south of Chandler, Chandler Heights Road. The rancher that dad contracted to work on his ranch had a building. It had been a store and he converted that store into a duplex. He just partitioned off half of the store and put two families in there. So one of the families we had been with in Eloy came with us up to the Chandler Heights Road house. There we looked for a place to go to school. Dad said you'll be able to go to school where everybody else goes. But we got there and looked around and he found out from other African Americans in the community that, no, there is no school in Chandler for Black kids so your kids will have to go to Mesa, there's an all Black elementary in Mesa, called Washington School, and that's where our kids go so that's where your kids will have to go.

They sent a bus from the Mesa school district out to Chandler Heights Road and beyond and gather up all the school age kids and take them into the elementary school, not the high school because Mesa had a policy where they exempted African American children in the high school. So the Mesa school district, the Black kids, when they graduated from 8<sup>th</sup> grade went to Mesa High. That wasn't so in Chandler. Mesa then would not accept any Chandler district school kids above the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. So my sister, she had finished the 8<sup>th</sup>, she went a second year in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade just so she could be with the kids in school instead of going to the fields. There was no school for her to go to. The next year, of course, my dad talked to his brother and worked out a deal with his brother where Ruth could stay with brother and his wife and go to Carver and that worked out fine for Ruth. The rest of us went to the Mesa school the first year to finish out the school year and pass to the next grade, the following year the Ocotillo School was reopened for African American kids. There we went through the 8<sup>th</sup> grade there, graduated from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, well Chandler had worked out a reciprocity deal with the Phoenix Union School District so that any African American kid who had graduated from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and wanted to go to high school could receive

- tuition, the Chandler Unified School District would pay the tuition to the Phoenix Union District for Black kids to go to school plus provide transportation. That's how we ended up going to Carver. Each Friday Ruth and I would go down to the high school and the superintendent would put cash money in our hands, and tell us this is the money for your bus tickets so don't spend it otherwise. That's why we went to Carver.
- JR: Where is that located?
- CP: It is located at 415 E. Grant Street. It is now the George Washington Carver Museum and Cultural Center.
- JR: Do you have any idea now that you are older, why Chandler area children would not have been able to attend Mesa High School?
- CP: Mesa would just not agree with Chandler that Mesa needed to take Chandler's high school kids when Mesa took care of its own high school kids. It was something like that. That was the reason. I think Mesa was trying to put pressure on Chandler to take care of its own high school kids like they were doing.
- JR: When did your family moved from the farm there on Chandler Heights Road into Chandler itself?
- CP: It was about 1944. We moved from the Chandler Heights Road house to the southeast quadrant of downtown Chandler which was on Saragosa Street.
- JR: Do you remember the name of the farmer on Chandler Heights Road?
- CP: The last name was Little. I remember some of the kids, there was a Denton Little, he and I were close to the same age. We worked together a lot and hauled grain during the summers.
- JR: When were you born?
- CP: I was born May 22, 1929 in Sulphur Springs, Texas, Hopkins County.
- JR: Where are you in the birth order?
- CP: I'm second. Ruth is the eldest, I'm second.
- JR: Name your other siblings.
- CP: The sister younger than me is, Marie Lee, after her was James Lewis or JL, then Willie Ruth, Ocie, John Edward, Wilmer, Charles. Marie is deceased, all the others are living.
- JR: Tell me a little bit about what it was like being a child here in the Chandler area and what it was like working in the fields, some of your memories from that.
- CP: One of the strongest memories I have is when we were students at the Ocotillo School, in the afternoons when school was out, if my parents happened to be picking cotton in the fields close the school, we would exchange our books for the cotton sack. We'd leave school, go out to the field; I hated the other kids seeing me going out to the field and putting on a cotton sack and picking cotton the rest of the daylight hour, but that's what we did. That had a strong impact on my life because I didn't think we ought to be doing that but with nine kids in the family mother and dad depended on us for whatever we could help the family do in the way of financial aid. That was part of it. We needed to buy our own clothing if we could or contribute to the buying or purchasing of those clothing and there

were other needs we had and we wanted to take care of ourselves too. We worked on the farm on the holidays. To me I don't recall celebrating the holidays like kids do today. We went to the field to work on the days we were out of school no matter what those days were, except for Thanksgiving or Christmas, we didn't work on those days per se, but Christmas vacation, if we were out two weeks, we worked in the fields those days. The same thing at Thanksgiving. We had a day of Thanksgiving and Friday we went to the fields. It was kind of like a work situation for us when school was out.

Ocotillo also afforded us chance to really get to know the other African American kids in the area. Those who lived in Chandler were bused out of Chandler to Ocotillo School, those who lived out in the country, they either walked to school or they were bused to the school. But we had to fraternize with other kids. We had two teachers that taught grades 1-8. One had grades 1-4 and the other had grades 5-8, so we were bunched in those grades. Those teachers taught everything, they taught music, they taught art, they were talented people, they were experts with kids. We received the very best education that they could provide for us and they were super. My 8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, the one I had for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade, she had a good command of the English language, I'd sit in the classroom and listen to her talk when she would instruct the class and I could just see myself doing the same thing, speaking as well as she was speaking. I wanted to be exactly like her. I wanted to be able converse as well as she did. That was an impression on me.

They were gregarious teachers, they were interested in our social welfare, how we got along at home, the things we did after school and on the weekends. My 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> grade teach got me involved in Boy Scouts along with other boys in the community, but there was no Boy Scout troop in Chandler to go to so she lived in Phoenix, she would take us on Fridays and that's when the Boy Scout troop met in Phoenix at Eastlake Park, she'd take us on Friday, we'd go to the meetings on Friday and we spent Friday night with her and she would bring us back home on Saturday. She did that for the two years when I was in Boy Scouts, which had a marked impression on me with some of the things I wanted to do with my life. I'm so appreciative of the fact that I did get that opportunity and she provided it without any pay.

JR: Thinking about the Ocotillo area, did you live on Chandler Heights and Arizona Avenue?

CP: It was Chandler Heights, east of the railroad track; there is a canal that diagonally cuts across Chandler Heights Road. The building was right on that canal facing the west. On the bank of the canal.

JR: Can you describe your memory of walking from home to school, what that would have looked like?

CP: Yes, the building we lived in had been a store. It was elongated, the color was yellow and had two entrances, front and back. We lived in the back part of the building and there was a family in the front part. Our activities centered around the backyard. In the back of the house there were trees, Tamarack trees, there was a well in which we got our water, we pumped water, we had one of those old well pumps, we pumped water for use in the house and bathing. The canal was mostly

always filled with water and there were fish in it and my brother and I, we used to go there and get in the canal, and we were really amazed at how you could catch fish. We would get in the canal and take our hands throw the fish out, you didn't have to use a hook. It was so plenteous in that water. We could get in a catch as many as we wanted. We went swimming in the same canal.

JR: What was it like walking from your house to school?

CP: Chandler Heights Road runs east and west. We would walk west from our house, cross the railroad tracks, cross Arizona Avenue. When we got down to about where the cemetery is now, we would cut across the field, kind of northwest. There was a Hispanic cemetery over there in that area, we would pass that Hispanic cemetery and journey on to the school which was directly northwest of that cemetery.

JR: Were there any other places in that Ocotillo town site that were important to you as kids?

CP: The store, Basha's store. That's where we got treats. When we picked cotton, they gave us tickets for every time you weighed your sack, you got a ticket and punched on that ticket, and you kept those tickets and went to Basha's store and cashed them. They would pay you \$3.00 a hundred for cotton. That store was an example of what we all aspired to be, where we all wanted to be someday, in that kind of a business because there were so many people coming and going to that store, so much activity around that store. Even when we were in school we would go to that store on our lunch hour, if the teacher would allow us, to buy treats for ourselves, in addition to the sack lunch we had. We could go buy cookies and stuff like that, pop. Sometimes we would buy the whole lunch, lunchmeat and bread and go back fix our own lunches at school. It was a great thing to be next to.

JR: When you finished school, once you graduated from Carver, what year was that?

CP: I graduated from Carver in 1949.

JR: Did you have hopes or dreams about what you wanted to do after you finished?

CP: Yes, I did. I had a civics teacher at Carver in my sophomore year, he was teaching class one day and he said to the class, "If you ever really want to feel worthwhile, go on and get your degree and come back to your community and give back to the community some of what it had given you". That just was what I needed to hear.

I started to think, well now, if that being the case, I think I can do that. I had always had a desire to be involved in community affairs. I knew that there were city council meetings going on because sometimes I would walk by on the evenings that they had city council meetings, I wondered what they were discussing, what kind of decisions were they making and did those decisions mean anything to us. My dad was not in there nor was anybody like him in that council meeting, so I wondered how could they make a decision about us and we are not represented there. It just made me want to be involved in community life and really make a difference where I felt I could. I felt this country was a place, if you wanted to, you could go as high as you want to go and I said that a few times to other people and to myself. So I was kind of motivated there although I took a

roundabout way to get back to it. That was implanted in me in high school to become a community minded person, to make the community a better place for those who resided here including myself.

JR: So what did you do once you finished high school?

CP: When I finished high school I went to ASU for a semester. But times were hard for mother and dad, and they could not afford to send anybody to college. However, my younger sister, the one that's deceased, she wanted to become a nurse, so mother and dad wanted her to become a nurse, so they decided she's the one we can support in college, and all of us will have to help out as much as we can. So that was the priority. She became a registered nurse and she did really well. So I had to defer my time going to college. When I went to ASU for a semester, I couldn't find a part time job to fit in with the schedule I had.

Being a farm worker doing field work did not allow you to go to school all day and then come and work in the field. So I was able to stay that semester. Then I dropped out. During that time the Korean War was going on and the draft was in force. So as I was not a student, the deferment they had on students did not apply so I was drafted and I went into the Army and served there two years. I was in the combat infantry out there in Korea and back after two years. I spent 18 months over there and came back to the states decided well, I'm going back to college but I have time, what I'm going to do now, I want to get a car for myself and have some fun. So I found a good job and was able to purchase a car, went to California to live for awhile, came back. Willie had always been here and I was interested in her, but I'm going to have a good time first. After I bought the car and had a good job, well my life was pretty empty. I decided this is not for me, I need to get somebody who thinks like I do and love and start a family together. That's when Willie and I started seeing each other on a regular basis and ended up getting married.

JR: When did you get married?

CP: We got married in 1954.

JR: What is Willie's maiden name?

CP: Woods.

JR: Was she a Chandler native too?

CP: No, she was born in northeast Texas, a little bit further northeast than my home. Her family came in 1944 for the first time. Then they came back after she graduated from high school and they stayed.

JR: So you were married in 1954, that's the same year that desegregation happened nationally. Thinking back to that time, it was a momentous time for you because you got married, but also there was some things happening on the national scene that impacted everybody. I'm wondering if you remember if there was any impact in Chandler in regards to desegregation?

CP: 1954 was that Supreme Court decision to desegregate schools. But Chandler had already desegregated schools in 1952. I had gone to Carver so I didn't know anything about Chandler High School, but my brothers and sisters under me all went to Chandler High School. So they had the benefit of that Supreme Court decision on desegregation which I didn't have, and I regret that I didn't because I

feel that if I had gone to an integrated school, that I would have gone farther than I really did academically in the school systems. But that wasn't the case and I don't regret going to an all Black high school because I had such wonderful teachers there who were really experts on how to deal with the type of kids that came out of the cotton fields, and off the farms, and menial labor parents, and so on. They knew how to deal with us and teach us and prepare us for college so we didn't suffer that much, the only suffering we really did was materially. We did not have all the materials we possibly could have had in other schools. Textbooks were usually second hand or used, uniforms for ROTC, the home economic department that Carver had patched and fixed those up so they were presentable. The rifles we had for ROTC were beaten up, we had to restore them and in order for us to compete with the other schools in the Phoenix Union systems on military night; our weapons weren't as good as theirs so that meant we had to do some work on them. So we did. So we learned self preservation, we learned how to deal with adversity and we learned how to, even though we were not in a diverse society, we learned the steps we needed to take when we did get into an integrated society like at college. I had never sat in a classroom with white kids until I went to college.

JR: What was that like?

CP: It was a shock to be honest with you. I was not prepared for it even though teachers had taught us; you know you can only be prepared so far and then you have to experience it. I guess there was a great feeling of low self-esteem. That is as best I can describe it. That happened to me in that classroom that first semester. I felt out of place, I felt my world had come to an end. I was alone for a few days, not the total semester because I picked up friends. No matter what color you are you have some common interests. I picked up friends that semester so things became a lot better. The thing I couldn't get used to, I had been in an all Black society in an all Black world and I go into a world where I'm the only Black, and that was really a shock to be in a classroom and all the classrooms during the day. I was the only Black and rarely did I see another Black on the campus. So those things I had to become accustomed to, I had to put them aside in order for me to feel that I don't need that, I can be the only one, I can do my best and come out on top.

I remember when I started high school, Fry Road, we lived below Frye Road, Saragosa Street. When I crossed Frye Road in the morning, going to catch the bus to go to Carver, I dropped the attitude that I had in the Black community because I was going to another city to be with people who lived in another. Even though they were Black, they were different from me, some of them had parents who were educated and they had experienced quite a good life. So I had to drop my feelings about myself at Frye Road and become a more exact person, better able to talk, converse with people, speak correct English, which was not always easy to do but I practiced it and it worked out. When I got off the bus in the afternoon and got back to my home in Chandler, when I crossed Frye Road going south, I picked up that cultural attitude again and that was with me the total time I was there. That was how we coped and it worked. We learned to be Jekyll and Hyde. An attitude of survival. We survived in that world we lived in; we survived the bus ride because on the bus, there were different people, these were white people and we were Black and on the same bus. Rosa Parks had not come

along then in the south they were still being forced to sit in the back of the bus. We could sit anywhere on the bus we wanted to, we could eat in the bus station, we couldn't eat in the drug store, but we could eat in the bus station. There were some restaurants here in Chandler that we could not go in and sit down and have a meal. We had to sit on a certain side of the theater when we went to a movie. So those kinds of things were going on all along with us going to school, transferring from one cultural group to another and back into our cultural group. Three different changes during the day that we had to cope with, that was every day. Kids are resilient. Kids can handle things that adults would probably have a nervous breakdown if they had to put up with some of the things that kids can manage. We learned to do those kinds of things.

JR: Thinking back after you got married what did you do then in the next step in your career?

CP: My next step was to go back to ASU. My wife, Willie, she was finishing ASU in 1954, she was coming out with a degree in accounting. We decided that as soon as she had her degree than I would go back to school. She was a domestic worker while she was going to ASU. She worked for some people who owned a business in the city of Chandler—the biggest business that was in the city of Chandler at that time, they sold mobile homes. She worked for one of the owners in their home, cleaned the house and so on. When they started selling mobile units, mobile trailers, they asked her to come in and detail and clean up the mobile units that were being sold, ones that had been traded in need of cleaning. She went to work cleaning the trailers.

The owner knew she was at ASU and she was going to get a degree in accounting which would put her in the business world, and he needed a good bookkeeper. He began to tell her a year before she graduated, when you get your degree you can come back and work for me in the office. Well, it so happened that one of her instructors in the accounting department at ASU had told her there is no hope for you working in anybody's office, so you might as well get your degree in teaching and go to a high school and teach accounting rather than go try to work in somebody's office. They will never accept you in an office setting, so don't try. But she pursued it because her boss had told her. So she finished her degree and he hired her, so for 17 years she was the accounting department for Ranch Trailer Sales, she ran the whole thing. Ledgers upon ledgers, they didn't have computer then, volumes of ledgers over those 17 years.

While she was doing that, I went back to ASU, I applied for my GI Bill, along with what she was making and what I was paid by the government, I was able to back to school. By now we had a couple kids. I went back to school, went back to the department of education, graduated in 1958 and came back to Chandler to teach. I had done my practice teaching in this school district and of course got a job when I graduated. I worked at the Winn Elementary School, which is the Salvation Army post down there now, had third grade there. I taught third grade there for five years, then they built Denver School, it is San Marcos now, and there I was moved up to the sixth grade, taught for 10 years, and moved to junior high,

Chandler Junior High School. First year I taught 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade English, the next year I was the assistant principal.

JR: Did you move on to anything from there or did you retire from there?

CP: I retired as assistant principal after 15 years.

JR: Recently I hear there was a school named after you.

CP: Yes, Payne Junior High School out on San Tan Boulevard, out on Higley and San Tan. It was named after Willie and me and dedicated about three or four weeks ago now.

JR: Congratulations, it was a nice thing that they did.

CP: Thank you, yes, it was quite an honor.

JR: When you started teaching at Winn School, were you the first African American teacher to be hired in these schools or were there others prior to you?

CP: There were others prior to me. My elementary school teachers were still teaching, and then they had hired a man who had come from Texas. His name is E. R. James, he became the 8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, they kind of did some things with Ocotillo before they closed it down. They had a 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher and then they had a 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> grade, they had three teachers out there. They divided the grades up so they had less of a load. There were about five other African American teachers who had gone through the Chandler system before I came along.

JR: So when Ocotillo closed in 1954, all the kids went to Winn?

CP: No, in 1954, the kids went to the Cleveland Elementary School which is here on Chandler Boulevard now. Winn School was still used for grades one through three. The lower grades. It was Hispanic and Black. It was a neighborhood school. Cleveland was first through sixth.

JR: How was it that you got involved in local politics here in the city of Chandler?

CP: First of all, when I became a teacher I had some time to devote to community work. I went to the Mayor then, his name was Nader, George Nader, I went to Mayor Nader and made myself available to him for boards and commission appointments. He was glad to see me and said, "I wish I had more citizens like you". When something came available, he appointed me, and that was the first thing, the Human Relations Commission. The Human Relations Commission was set up because of the racial strife that was going on in the country, and Arizona and Chandler were trying to be ahead of all of it and make sure we didn't get involved in situations that would cause a racial strife. So the Human Relations Commission was to do just that. That was in the 1960's. It was in the early 60's that the commission was set aside.

We did things like "know your neighbor" banquets on an annual basis. The community would sit down in a dinner setting and converse with one another. We'd sit somebody who worked in the field, we'd sit that person across from a doctor, or we would switch things around so no two of the same kind would be together, so they could get a chance to know each other.

The ethnicity, we'd mix that up so that we didn't have the ethnic sitting across from each other. Those things worked really well. The Housing Authority came out of that, I was appointed to Housing Authority, I was the first chairman of the Housing Authority. In fact we brought the public housing to the city of Chandler, still in the late 60's. We were working for better public housing for the citizens of the community.

JR: Where was the first housing project?

CP: It was here on Williams Field Road and McQueen. That is where we started and it's still there. Then we built several others throughout the community. Those two boards I was on, and there were many other opportunities to serve, but those two were the most significant because they got me thinking if I can do this on boards and commission then perhaps I can become an elected person. The next board I came on to was the Parks and Recreation Board. It was instrumental in bringing Folley pool to the city of Chandler. To bring a state of the art swimming pool to Folley Park. First we developed Folley Park, then brought the pool there. So I began to think strongly that I could probably do a better job for the community if I would just get into an elected position.

Jim Patterson, he was running for Mayor that year, in 1980, he asked me if I would like to run for City Council because there was a vacant seat, and he said, you could probably get that seat, and I'll help you as much as I can, and if you feel that I can't help you then let me know and I won't. But if you think you can use my help, I'm willing to help you. So I said alright. I decided this is what I'll do, and I did and won that seat, took my seat in 1982 and was off and running as far as elected position was concern. Served eight years on City Council. I narrowly got back on there and in my second term I got into a run off [with the current Mayor, Boyd Dunn]. I prevailed and got on the Council another four years. During those years on the council, those were years of learning and putting together strategy to try to get me in a position to be Mayor because I had decided to be Mayor. In fact, I know I was a little conceited about this, but I felt that what I was observing from the Mayor's seat in many cases I could do better and I wanted a chance to see if that would be true.

I started to gather the support from the community that I needed by meeting with people and being a good listener and then offering solutions to some of the problems people were faced with. This all appealed to me, I liked to be where things are done to solve problems. I just loved that. I was headed in the right direction. Near the end of my second term I was offered a chance to retire from the school district, which I had not even thought of even though it was my 30<sup>th</sup> year in the school district, I hadn't given it any thought. But that window came open where my income would not be negatively impacted if I retired so I took it and that put me right in the place I needed to be so I could run for Mayor.

JR: When did you retire?

CP: I retired in 1989. Ran for Mayor that year and prevailed. Won the election, I guess some people were calling me "Landslide Payne" because I overcame my opponent by a vote of 2 to 1. I won every precinct during that election.

JR: Who was your opponent?

CP: Jane DeComb. So I became Mayor. I remember on the election Tuesday in 1989, I was driving down Fry Road, it was about 4:00 pm and the thought hit me, suppose tomorrow morning you wake up and you are Mayor, and it scared the dickens out of me. It could be, but that was a great feeling I had. After I really thought about, I thought, well that would be nice if I wake up tomorrow morning and I'm Mayor. It happened and I became Mayor and I was very happy and my family was excited about it and I was excited because here now I have an opportunity to put into action some of the thoughts that I've carried all these many years. The people of Chandler gave me that opportunity. They did not look at the color of my skin, nor my ethnicity, they did not see me as any but a person who could do a job. I had been in the education field for 30 years, I knew all the kids that had come through Chandler schools, especially the 15 years I was at Chandler High School, every kid in the district went through Chandler Junior High School during that time. I remember saying when I was running for Council I would say to the kids, "go home and tell your dad, your mom, you better vote for me or you are going to get a failing grade". Some of them really went home and told them because some of the parents told me, but we laughed about it. I had fun with it and I did have great name recognition, people knew me. They knew the kind of person I was, they knew what I stood for, they knew me as a person and by the help of God and the people I became Chandler's first Black Mayor which I was very proud of.

JR: Do you feel like being in a community that the majority of the people in the community were Anglo and coming from the background, all the experiences you had as a young man, a child growing up here, did you feel when you started running for Mayor and taking that big step, were you unsure as to what the outcome would be because of racial issues, or do you feel like people had moved so much farther forward by that time that wasn't an issue here?

CP: That wasn't an issue. I had become so immersed in the community with so many people, these were not Black people, these were white people, these were my friends, these were the people that knew me, these were the people that I knew, these were people who would help me, people that I would help if I could, it didn't make any difference because they were white, I would have done for them what I would do for a Black person. I had that kind of a feeling. We were just people, I forgot my color, I forgot my ethnicity, I was really able to put that aside and act on the premise that I'm a human being and by the grace of God I can go as far as I'm willing to take the step to do. I had white friends that would have given me the shirts off their backs they would have done anything for me. If they knew I was in need of something they would have gotten it for me, that was the kind of feeling that I know existed with some of the white friends that I had. That's why I had no fear. I wasn't fearful of anything that might happen to me as a result of my being the race that I am because I forgot about that, I laid that aside. That's the ultimate in a person's life, if they can lay aside personal differences and then come together to work the problems that may exist.

JR: I think that's a wonderful story to talk about race relations in America and making steps forward from the past that we've had in our country's history.

CP: It's everybody's responsibility. It's mine, I cannot look at myself and say, well I didn't have this, I didn't have that, so it's not my responsibility. Yes, it is my responsibility, if we want to make it right, want to put it in the proper perspective it is my responsibility as well as better than me looking at someone else and saying, well, it's his responsibility, he's suppose to do it. No he's not, I am. If I see it and it's a problem and I realize it's a problem and I have some idea of how to solve I need to do it as well as he.

JR: Let's talk a little bit about some of your memories from the time being on Council and being as Mayor as well, what were some of the important issues or things that were going on during time on Council that you felt were sort of big at that time?

CP: Improvement districts were very important because when I came on the council we were trying to plan the community so that it would be the best planned community in the east valley. Chandler was going to be that community. So we, with staff and all the expertise that we could gather, by going to national league of cities meetings in Washington every year or going to city meetings across the country, we were gathering information about how to plan a city from the ground up because Chandler had a lot of rural land at the time and I believe our area of development was 52 square miles. We had a lot of developing that could be done but we need proper infrastructure to support the kind of development that we wanted to bring forth. So improvement districts were a by-word at the time. Those districts were set aside so that developers could participate in the paying for as well as the citizen paying for the infrastructure that would support the developers dreams in those area. So improvement districts was one of the big things going on when I came on the Council.

The assessments that came as a result of those improvement districts took a lot of negotiation with landowners, property owners on those assessments because we wanted to make sure that new growth paid for itself. We did not want to spread the cost of new growth over the older growth areas in the city. So we tried to guard against that.

We moved up the ladder as far as developing the community. People after a while began to see the work of what we were doing because we had projects going in. We had an industrial park established out here for the purpose of putting all industry in that park away from residential areas. People could live in the area, work in the area, play in the area and still be separated from the factories. That was the concept that we picked up by meeting with different groups across the country.

Those were two areas that I recall that we were really working with and worked through to make sure that Chandler was a well planned community. We also looked at the, I was interested in Chandler being the green spot of the Valley, so I wanted to see more green belt areas in the city which meant in the eyes of most people, and here's how we can do that, that is by making sure we have parks located strategically throughout the community, those could be the green spots.

We even talked about linear green spots along the waterways, canals, both sides of the canal, making it a recreational type setting along the canals that run through the city. Bike paths, we really wanted to make sure that we could go from one segment of our community to the other without having to get on a major arterial on a bike. Today you see the results of that, we have bike paths on a lot of our streets and we have some development along the waterways that run through the city. Those are some of the issues as a council member we had.

We had our financial situation. We wanted to make sure we had an A+ financial record so that the lending people, people in New York would look favorably on us when it came time for us to do business. We made sure we had our financial picture in order and received a high rating every year because of the expertise that went into the planning. We were interested in making sure we had adequate police force. Public safety was a key and we talked about response time. Fire Department and Police response time. We tried to make sure that in four minutes they could be wherever the incident was. Those were the kind of things that I remember doing as a person on the council.

The year before I ran for Mayor in 1989, we had an airport issue in Chandler. We wanted to do an expansion at the airport because it was rumored that Williams Air Force Base was going to be closed and we needed to do something with our Chandler Airport and wanted to take up the slack that would be left by the closure of WAFB. So Chandler-Gilbert Community College had come, it was now operating, and they wanted to do an aeronautics program out there where they would be training mechanics to work on aircraft, which hopefully they were going to be able to feed into Williams if it had remained a pilot training. We wanted to continue to do that, we wanted to encourage commercial air flights into Chandler Airport. The residents did not see eye to eye with us on that because they afraid of those planes coming in and larger planes coming because extended runways, so we had to work out a plan with the residents so that it was a win-win thing. We came up with the idea of a parallel runway that would run the same way as the one we had but would make enough room to handle the aircraft that would be coming in there and they wouldn't have to be so noisy when they passed over the residential area. We had an 8 point plan that we utilized that if we went to the people and it became an initiative and everyone was happy and the airport issue disappeared. That was kind of the biggie as far as my stint on the City Council.

We had some agreements with the school district, we fostered a relationship with the school district and the city to work together to build the performing arts center. That was a crowning point as far as two entities relating to each other in such a way that they could have a common edifice both could utilize. Scheduling was no problem for the city or the school district and that worked out really well. I was really proud of that, at that time I was in the school. It meant we were doing things the right way. The aquatic center up in northwest Chandler was a result of a governmental agreement with the Mesa School District and the City of Chandler. We have a swimming pool as well as other facilities. Mesa had always had a policy at the time and still does where at every junior high school has a swimming pool.

So Hendricks Junior High School was built and we said why not, why can't we talk to Mesa and go together with Mesa to put in a swimming pool. Desert Breeze Park was built at the time. We were on the move as far as the quality of life issues of our community. I think we did a great job, Mayor and Council, did a great job in promoting an attitude in the community that appreciated what we were doing and today people are proud of that, and laud it today as an accomplished fact for the city council doing those years.

JR: In the 80's, the growth was really happening in west Chandler and north Chandler?

CP: It was north and west at that time.

JR: When you began serving as Mayor in 1990, what was Chandler like? Think about population, major industry or major economic factors.

CP: 1990 we had Motorola, it was a major employer. Intel was the biggest employer we had in 1990. Motorola wanted to expand its operation on Alma School in 1990, there was some dissention among the residents living contiguous to the Motorola plant. We had to allay a lot of fears and concerns those people had about hazardous waste and what was going to happen in the future because of some of the things that happened in the past as far as Motorola plants are concerned. We had people from Scottsdale come to our meetings and that didn't help the issue at all because they were saying one thing and we were trying to say another. It was a negotiation process. I was always of the mind if we can talk to people, if we can sit down and talk about situations, we can come to a point where those unfounded fears can dissipate. That's what happened with the residents and Motorola. We finally were able to negotiate to a point with Motorola and the residents that they lost their fear and concern about Motorola. It did expand and there was no harm to the community. We kept a watch on it, which is what we assured the residents we would be, watching their waste material, water use, we were not just turning them lose.

JR: People were concerned about pollution of ground water?

CP: Yes.

JR: Do you remember the population in 1990?

CP: It was about 90,000.

JR: What were the general city limits in 1990?

CP: We still were talking that 52 square mile concept. The city boundaries were – the western canal on the north, Hunt Highway on the south, I 10 on the west and there were spots in between us and Gilbert that would zigzag and jogged in and out so there is no straight line, the boundary with Gilbert goes so many different ways, generally what it is today. Most of the southern was agricultural.

JR: During your time as Mayor, what did you want to accomplish specifically?

CP: Mainly we wanted to make sure that we got our fair share of transportation development. We were negotiating with ADOT, we were going to ADOT almost on a daily basis, especially on a weekly basis, to negotiate with ADOT to share some of the responsibility of helping us get where we needed to be transportation wise.

We were lobbying MAG, we were members of the Maricopa County Association of Governments, we lobbied in the MAG meetings, lobbied in the mass transit meetings that we had for our fair of the freeway dollars so we could develop a transit system or freeway system where we could have economic development along that.

Westcor wanted to develop a regional shopping mall in the city of Chandler and they had the land to do it. They were talking to us about the part they thought we should play in helping them do it. They would do it if we could get access roads, frontage roads, down from Galveston Street past where the regional mall is. If we could get frontage roads down to Pecos exactly, they would build the regional shopping mall. We went to ADOT, we talked to the state of Arizona and were able to come up with an agreement where we could front some money, enough money, then the frontage roads would be put in and then Westcor could go ahead and build their shopping mall. We were willing to put up \$8.1 million which was our part of federal dollars to start the ball rolling. ADOT said go ahead with it and I think it was a \$29 million adventure, but we went ahead and they started the roads; it became a reality. Westcor started to build the mall.

My first term in 1990 we began a pilot recycling program. We realized that our landfills were becoming full at a rapid rate. We needed to do something about taking some of that refuse out of the landfills so we started a recycling program. It was a pilot at first.

Downtown redevelopment in Chandler was moving forward. We made sure that we were looking at the downtown area, what I did a lot of times, my public information officer and I would leave my office and walk the streets of Chandler, meet with the merchants that were located in the downtown area, talk with them about what their aspirations were, what their needs were, what they felt we could do, from that we were able to formant a plan that would move downtown redevelopment forward. People might think there wasn't much done, [but] yes, there was a lot done, because an organization was created. Out of that organization you have remnants of that organization working today and look at the downtown area today. Its part of the fruition of what we started there.

We purchased the Desert Breeze land and opened a regional park out there. The 1990-91 budget was approved by the City Council and it sailed through, there was no dissention on it. We had a mandate to move forward as far as financing was concerned.

The City and county agreed to expand Alma School Road south, we were working on getting it because it was in such bad shape, people could hardly come from Sun Lakes up to the City of Chandler without problems. We bought the old Seton High property, there's nothing on it yet, but it was part of the redevelopment of the downtown was to buy pieces of property so we could put together a package for developers to interest them in coming to the downtown area. It's finally been approved today, which is a great thing to see. Those are things that we worked on as a Council and I think we set the mode for what is happening today.

JR: Where there any other particular issues while you were Mayor that jumps out at you, maybe even things that happened outside of Chandler that affected Chandler?

CP: One of the things that happened during my first term as Mayor is was the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday. You know it had been rescinded by Governor Mecham, and then it came back as an issue for people to vote on and it passed. Chandler was involved in a resolution to the state of Arizona in support the MLK holiday, and I was glad to see that happen. It meant a lot to a lot of people. It also helped a lot of people who thought they wouldn't be helped by it because it put people's minds at ease about the importance of a Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday. That was one of the major issues that took place during that year.

JR: What kind of traits did it take to be a leader while you were Mayor?

CP: We had what we called retreats. The Council and Mayor went on retreats, we went to Sedona during a summer month, there we would formulate to a facilitator, goals and objectives for the coming year. We had a chance to talk to each other and do work sessions on the accomplishment of those goals. Those retreats really paid off. We had a values program that we dwelled on a lot. We wanted high values in our staff and we wanted to get that across to the citizens that our value system was tops. We would discuss those kinds of issues in our retreats. The leadership I think I showed in those conferences was that I always had the idea that personal feelings should never enter into a decision-making process. So I would emphasize in my speaking to the Council in those retreats that personal feelings had to be left at the door.

When we come to the Council meeting we need to have buried all of our differences because we came to do what was in the best of the citizens of Chandler. We have to be together on what we are doing as far as that decision is concerned. No matter what it might look like, it might look like that when we go out to the Council meeting that we are in lockstep, that we always have 7 – 0 vote, if that's the way it is, so be it. We have already done our homework, we've already worked out things in the places we should work them out, in our retreats, in our study sessions, just bring those issues you have to the Council study sessions, the agenda items you want to get more informed about. So when we go to the Council meeting we can do a dressed up type thing for the people because they don't deserve to be humiliated or disgusted at what we are doing up here in the Council chamber. Let's do all those ugly things there and when we come out present our very best. I think by and large we did that.

I always I think it had an effect on the length of meetings. We didn't have many long drawn out meetings because we had solved a lot of the issues before we came to our formal council meeting. I would advise any Mayor and Council to do that kind of thing, it's just less wear and tear. Staff is more stable, staff has a better picture of how it's suppose to operate, there are no willy nillys as far as staff is concerned. If you don't have those kinds of things, staff can do its job. We hired a staff to do a job. We hired a City Manager to do a job. To manage the city, we set the policy and we give guidance, City Manager does the managing, he and his staff, let them do their job.

If you do that, then you are just going to have a better community. Citizens are going to feel better and staff is going to be able to do his job better because he doesn't have to look over his shoulder. It just works well when we are working things out in a decent and orderly manner.

JR: What do you feel like were your major accomplishments during your term as major?

CP: One of the major accomplishments was the expansion of the Intel Plant. That was a negotiation process we went through, that was a major boom to our economic picture. To me, it was a hallmark.

Another was the Westcor building the regional shopping mall, the day after it was open you couldn't get into the parking lot. That also started in my administration with my council, we put together a negotiation team with the City Manager to deal with Westcor and all the concerns that Westcor had to make that become an entity that citizens are very proud of today.

I served on boards and committees as a Mayor, I was on the Arizona Water Users Association Board and we were instrumental in helping to settle the Indian Water Rights as it pertained to the Indian communities throughout Arizona. We did that during those years.

I served on the Rapid Transit Authority and we insisted that Chandler get its share of the buses that running throughout the valley, we were able to bring that about. We built bus shelters, those are a must for people waiting to catch buses, especially in the heat. We made sure the routing of those buses took care of the needs of the people, taking them from where they lived to where they needed to go throughout the Chandler community and into Phoenix. We made sure that citizens could visit their parks and come downtown in safety. They could go to park affairs and be in safety.

We had public safety uppermost in our mind. One of the things my parting from the Mayor's office was, we needed money to enhance our public safety organization, Chandler Police and Fire. We had to of course, raise taxes in order to do that. So ½ cent sales tax was asked for and this is the first time and probably the last time you are ever going to hear this, that the citizens came to that Council meeting when we were going to approve that and they actually cheered. There was wall to wall people in the Council chambers that night and they cheered. That we had put that money where it needs to be and that is, public safety. That to me was a hallmark.

JR: What do you feel has made Chandler the city that it is today?

CP: The people. The people who reside in Chandler are very proud. First, we have a young, educated, very intelligent population. We have some very wealthy people in Chandler, we have people who have been here since year one, you put all those together and you got a great mix as far as growing a city and they are here. The population has expanded and is growing leaps and bounds even today.

I recall when we reached 100,000 and that was a really proud point. I remember putting up a sign at the borders of Chandler and Mesa, Chandler city population: 100,000. It was a proud moment in the 1990's.

JR: If you were to look ahead to 2012, which is our city's centennial, what would your prediction be of what Chandler will be like?

CP: First of all, it will be completely built out by then. We'll be completing our in-fills, it will be a vibrant, thriving city in 2012 to celebrate its birthday. Dr. Chandler would be proud of his dream.

JR: Do you think there will be anything new that will be here that we don't have already?

CP: Well our needs will determine what will come as a new entity. What do the citizens consider they want to happen in the city of Chandler? We used to have "tomorrow conferences", we went to a place like Wickenburg or Payson or Prescott and we did a lot of exposing ourselves to answering what Chandler would want and we were admonished to think big. What is it that the citizens of Chandler really want to see happen in the near future and the distant future? And whatever it is that they want to see happen, that's what will happen. Because of the "tomorrow conferences" a lot of the things you see today are happening because these were things that came out of the "tomorrow conferences". Ideas, by having a group of citizens from all ethnicities in the city meeting in a place away from the city to express themselves in terms of what they think Chandler ought to be or how they think Chandler ought to be. I think that idea is still in the citizens minds and they from time to time are expressing those ideas to the Mayor and Council so the Mayor and Council will have to a listening device for those people and their ideas in order to make Chandler what it is capable of becoming based on the resources that it has.

JR: In 2012, what do you think will be gone?

CP: I think all of the dilapidated housing will be gone. The city will have cleaned itself up to a point you would not recognize the neighborhoods that are now run down, they would all be redone. I think the downtown Chandler is going to be a thriving Mecca because it is going to be a place where people will want to come because of what is located there. It is going to assume its role as a center of attention as far as Chandler is concerned. By 2012 I expect this to be a reality.

JR: Why do you think Chandler's history is important?

CP: Because Chandler houses individuals who are concerned, who care, who want to know what happened, why it happened, and who want to be able to predict with some reliability what is going to happen in the future.

JR: How do you think Chandler's history be preserved?

CP: So much of history in the past has been written. I know we have greater means to preserve history now. Of course we've always had those means. Artifacts, in writing, now we have the film, the computer, we have all those technicalities that can be utilized in preserving the history of the community. I think we should put every one of those in greater use in making sure that we do not miss one bit of Chandler's history. I think it can be done if we would just marshal our forces and pull together. I don't know where it's going to be kept, I'm concerned about that, how will it be preserved. Once we collect the artifacts, once we collect the material, once we collect the photographs, once we collect all of these things. Where will we put it, where will it be? Who is going to manage it? Do we have an agency in the City of Chandler that can manage the history of Chandler? We need that most of all, a managing agency for history as far as this community is concerned, otherwise some of it will get away from us and we'll lose it. It would be a shame to lose what has been collected in the way of history, because that's how people know who they are, know whether they have improved, or how much they can improve and so on.

JR: You did some research and found out that you have the honor of being the first African American Mayor in the state of Arizona, how do you feel about that?

CP: You know it goes back to my original feeling that it's not really all that important to me that I'm the first and only Black Mayor for the state of Arizona. The important thing is that I was the Mayor for the city of Chandler. That's what is important to me. That's what I tell myself, that's what I keep in view. When I look at myself in the mirror, I'm proud that I was the Mayor of Chandler. The most proud that I've become is that people saw enough in me to elect me as Mayor and to give me the opportunity to make that difference that I always felt that I could. I'm very grateful and thankful that this took place.