

THERESA MAO
FEBRUARY 15, 2022

Catherine: I am here today with Theresa Mao. I would like to get your permission to quote you in all or in part anything from this interview that is published on the Town's website.

Theresa: Yes

Catherine: When did you come to Arizona and particularly the Town of Paradise Valley?

Theresa: My late husband and I came from New York City in 1968. First, we lived in the Arcadia area of Phoenix on Monterosa Street close to 56th Street right next to Exeter. We did not look in Paradise Valley nor the desert. I wanted all the green and all of the trees.

Then I started to learn horseback riding. I trained at Jokake Inn – western riding. After 2 years, I decided that I wanted to have my own horse. We started to look for houses or land where I could have horses. I also needed natural gas because when I cook something Chinese, I like to use gas versus electricity. It's amazing that many places here in Paradise Valley don't have natural gas. I knew that Paradise Valley was very nice – better than Arcadia.

I was looking a little bit north. I almost bought 5 acres – the Dupont property. This property was far but still in Paradise Valley – almost at Mummy Mountain – down below on Mummy Mountain not high up. I really liked the house. It had horse privileges, but it didn't have gas. Then after a while, my late husband said how about this: "Forget about buying horse property just rent horses because I don't want to smell yours or other people's horses."

Instead of horse property, I decided that I really liked stone – the rocks. We found this lot, 5536 East Solano Drive in Stone Canyon. What really attracted me was the big rock. I had never seen a rock that big.



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We bought the lot right after Christmas in 1970. Stone Canyon has an east and a west side. Most of the houses were on the west side because they opened up first. Our house is on the east side and is the largest lot in Stone Canyon. There was only one house on the east side at the time. It was owned by the Paradise Valley Country Club – for the golf pro. He's gone now but his house is still there. And now it's all redone.

Catherine: Did you just give up on the horses?

Theresa: Because we didn't buy horse property, I founded the Camelback Saddle Club in 1970 or 1971. It's a women's club. We used the horses from Jokake Inn. Pete was the chief wrangler and owned the horses at the Jokake Inn. We would go out once a week or sometimes two times a month. The club is still active, but I don't know too much now because I'm totally out of it. The club still rides in the Prada del Sol. I'm the number 70. This is my hat.

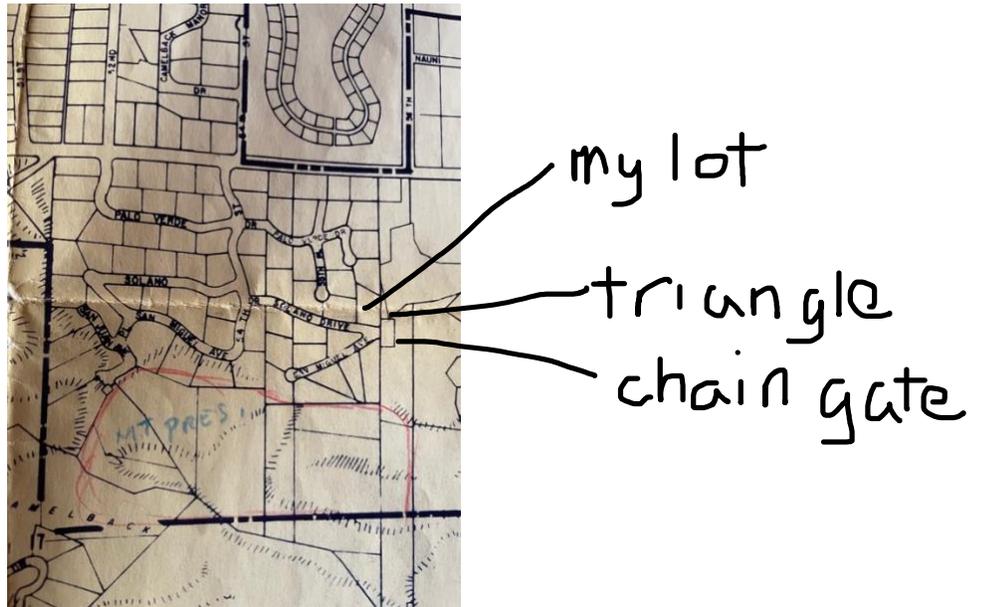


Catherine: What was the neighborhood like when you first moved here?

Theresa: My lot is very deep. I have 2 neighbors on the west side and only one neighbor on the north side and then what was John Gardener's Tennis Ranch – now the Sanctuary - on the east side. When we first came, the lot west of me was empty – but later on, the president of General Motors built the house as his winter home. They were not here all of the time. They were very nice. The next person to live in that house moved the entrance of the house from Solano and put it on the street below which is cul-de-sac. In front of them, which is still west of me but north of them - I don't know who owned it before but later on Ginger Renner and her husband lived there. He is the authority on Charles Marion Russell. He personally knew him. Ginger Renner has an art gallery in Palm Springs. She was very nice. Then directly in front of me (north), the McCarthy's owned the house. They owned the land on the corner of Scottsdale

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and Lincoln – where AJ’s and the gas station are. Then there is a very thin long lot – a triangle lot – at the time it’s was owned by the John Gardener’s Tennis Ranch. John Gardener’s asked me if I wanted to buy this little piece – the triangle. By that time, I had already built my house, so I said no. Later on, they built a house on that property for the tennis pro, Ken Rosewall, from Australia. It was a two-story house with a tennis court on the roof. He had 2 or 3 children. They lived there half a year and then went back to Australia the other half. Then they built a lot of casitas so close to me which I really don’t like but what can I do. Anyone who has a commercial lot should be at least have 50 feet away from the residential. The square lot on the east of the road is an opening – there is a chain gate there. When I bought this lot, I could see out to Four Peaks. They planted oleander all the way down – I cannot see anything anymore. If they trimmed the oleanders more to the middle, then I could see Four Peaks again.



Catherine: Who built your house?

Theresa: Blaine Drake – he is now deceased. He was a graduate of the Frank Lloyd Wright School. I started to look for an architect to design and build the house. At first, I considered the guy who built all of the casita’s right next to me at the Tennis Ranch. He was very nice. When I interviewed him as an architect, he asked us to go to his place in Rocky Point. Then I went to see a Blaine Drake house. He built quite a few nice houses. I went to look at Robert McCall’s house (the artist) before he bought it and I really liked the look of it. It was open and to my specific taste. That’s when I changed and said I wanted Blaine Drake. I employed him in 1971 and right away I said I wanted a house – the brick detail - to look like Camelback

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Mountain. I ordered the brick – nobody has this color – because I didn't want people to see the house. I want it to meld into the mountain. We moved into the house in 1972.



Catherine: How did you get involved in the undergrounding of the utility poles? It was in 1969 when the Town started undergrounding utility poles.

Theresa: This started after my husband died so it was after 1983. It was after a new family moved into the house above me – Tom and Marilyn Husband. Marilyn and I started talking about the big water tank that was painted white right in front of the chain gate to John Gardner's Tennis Ranch. It really bothered me so I said I wanted a color like beige that would meld into the mountain. So, the two of us went ahead and got little paint squares to see what color would be good. When we found a good color, I called the water company. I said that we would like you to improve the look of your water tanks. They were nice. It was all privately owned. They went ahead and painted the tanks. It improved so much that they had all the water tanks painted. That was beautification #1.

Then I said that I hated all of the telephone poles. When you set up to do something you need help. So, I wanted everybody to get to know each other and I started having cocktail parties in different neighbors' homes. One year it was at my next-door neighbor's house – George Alpert and his wife – I can't remember her name. They lived in the old GM house. George was a musician. I talked to everyone and said, "How about we put the poles underground?" George said, "No Theresa I don't want it because the electrical wire with all those little birds on it, it's like the notes. I enjoy them." So, he refused. We kept up with the social gatherings

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Then George died – the one that liked the birds on the wire – so Marilyn and I started again. We were a really good team. We would get some residents to sign up and Marilyn would type up a list with the telephone number and whatever information was needed. We wrote letters to people. I talked to the Town and they said ok you have to start collecting signatures. You didn't have to pay any money yet, but you needed the signatures. It was not that hard because Marilyn and I just did it. It took almost another two years before we collected the deposits. The people, especially in Stone Canyon - only about 20% are here in the summertime. So, when you want to collect something, it's hard. We separated the neighborhood and called it the "high land" and the "low land." The higher up ones paid \$4,500 each. The low ones only \$1,500 each. The first street south of McDonald – they were all \$1,500. I think we were district 11. I only wanted to take care of Stone Canyon, but the Town wanted us to collect from the "orphan" neighborhood – west of Stone Canyon on Valle Vista Way – maybe 10-12 houses. They were not in a district. I had never met those people. You had to have 75% down payment and the rest of the neighbors could come in free. I was so disappointed because to me everybody at that time could pay their \$1,500 or \$4,500. One family that I am very friendly with would not pay the \$4,500. After that I really gave up. I was not going to do everything for everybody – all they do is enjoy it – the privilege. We have to do our best to keep this place beautiful and quiet and really dark – not having all of the lights.

One other thing that I would like to see is that we make our street signs bigger. I don't want lights to shine on it but at least when people are driving, they can read the signs. It should be that when your headlights hit it that it shows up more. We have a lot of older people here. I won't go to people's cocktail party at night because I can't see the street signs.

Catherine: Why don't you tell me about you and your family.

Theresa: I was born in 1936 in Shanghai. I am the 6th of the 7 siblings. I went to McTyeire School which is a very good boarding school for girls in Shanghai. It was a Presbyterian school. Just before the communists came in 1948, we left Shanghai and went to Taiwan. I lived in Taiwan for 5 ½ years from when I was 12 until I was 17. Of my 7 siblings, all of them are in America except one who lives in Taiwan.

Both of my parents were highly educated. My father went to college in Hong Kong and got his master's degree here. My mother went to Japan for her master's degree. My grandfather on my mother's side was a Presbyterian minister. I was Presbyterian until my senior year of high school when I attended catechism class taught by my future husband's brother, Father John T. S. Mao. As a Presbyterian, my Chinese name was Lim Su Yng. My English name was Molly. But when Father Mao baptized me, I changed it to Theresa after St. Theresa. I'm the only catholic in my family.

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In 1954, when I was 17, I came to America for undergraduate school. I went to Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio, Texas. I loved it in San Antonio. The summer after my freshman year, 1955, I stayed in San Antonio and worked at the Sinclair Oil office. My second summer, I had a job at Sinclair Oil but this time in Gary, Indiana. I lived in the International House at The University of Chicago. I met my future husband during this time in Chicago. We didn't marry for another 7 years. After undergraduate school, I wanted to go to New York because Father Mao was there. At the time, there were hardly any catholic Chinese. I got accepted at Columbia, NYU and Fordham. I went to Fordham University and received a master's degree in chemistry and mathematics and a PhD in Chemistry in February 1964.

In 1964, Esso Research Lab, a subsidiary of Standard Oil, hired me as a physical chemist in Linden, New Jersey. I was the first woman PhD hired at Esso.

Catherine: Tell me how you met your husband Peter.

Theresa: I knew about Peter because he was the president of the Catholic Student Association in America. To join, you had to send to him an application with your picture. He saw my picture with my application form so, he knew about me. When I went to Chicago, these 2 brothers, who were my brother's best friends back in China, took me to a restaurant in China Town in Chicago. Peter was at that same restaurant with a girl he was dating. Peter knew the 2 boys I was with and came over by himself. He said, "Oh, you must be Theresa – Theresa Lim." I said yes. He said, "I am Father Mao's brother. I'm Peter." And that's how we met. I did not date him until the next year. Peter was 3 years older than me. He was the brightest man I had met. That's why I married him. I met him when I was a sophomore in college, and he was a sophomore in medical school. He was at Loyola University – Stritch School of Medicine. Peter and I got married in 1962. His brother, Father John T. S. Mao, who was visiting New York from Taiwan at the time, married us.

Catherine: Tell me about Father John T. S. Mao.

Theresa: Peter was the youngest child of 9 children. John T. S. Mao was the 2nd oldest and 21 years older than Peter. John went to Rome when he was only 14 and was ordained there. Because China was at war with Japan (1937-1945), Father Mao couldn't go back to China, so he went to Leon, France and got a PhD in psychology. Then the Bishop responsible in France sent him to America to convert the Chinese to Catholicism. The Chinese that came to America to work on the railroads were not educated. They were mostly from Canton and very poor towns. Father Mao built churches in the Chinese areas in the US to convert them. He started his first church in Boston and then a second one in Philadelphia and finally one in Chicago. Since the Chinese are very education minded, he built the churches with the best elementary schools.

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The Boston one is gone now but the Churches and schools in Philadelphia and in Chicago are still there.

Catherine: Tell me about your 2 daughters

Theresa: Lisa Kay and Charlotte were born in the Bronx while my husband was doing his residency at Albert Einstein University Hospital. I waited to work until I had both babies. Charlotte was not even 6 months old when I went to work for Esso. Lisa Kay is an ophthalmologist and her husband is a federal judge. They live in Florida. Charlotte is an infectious disease doctor and her husband is the founder of City Year a non-profit organization. After 30 years, he resigned and is now doing non-profit consulting. Charlotte and her husband live in Massachusetts. I have 6 grandchildren.

Catherine: When did your husband pass away?

Theresa: My husband, Dr. Peter Mao, died suddenly of a heart attack in February 1983. He was very well known as a cancer expert. Most of the physicians, when they had important cases, marked the chart "Dr. Mao only." They wanted him to read it. When they themselves or their family had an operation, they would call him first to find out if he was going to be in town so they could schedule with him. When he died, he was the head of the pathology department at St. Joseph Hospital.

Catherine: Tell me how you became involved with the Franciscan Renewal Center?

Theresa: I always try to go to the parish church where my house is. When we lived in Arcadia for 4 years, we belonged to St. Theresa on Thomas Road. When we moved here, the parish church was the one south of Camelback – Our Lady of Perpetual Health – I belonged to that one. The Franciscan Renewal Center is much closer. Father Welsh – I think is his name – he was the head over there. We liked him very much.

Sometimes God and Angels just kind of lead you – I said to my husband after we went there for 2 years – what about when we die, you are supposed to use your own parish church. The Franciscan Renewal Center does not belong to a parish so anybody who wants to belong can. I don't think it is under the Archbishop of Phoenix. It is the St. Francis order. Their headquarters, I think, is in Santa Barbara, California. So, this is their retreat center. Then suddenly one day my husband died of a heart attack. Officially we belonged to OLPH. He was buried in the catholic cemetery south of Thomas Road around 42nd Street – St Francis Catholic Cemetery. After my husband died, I went to OLPH for a year. Then I decided I didn't like that church as much as the Franciscan Renewal Center, so I started going there.

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Catherine: Do you volunteer for the Franciscan Renewal Center or are you involved in other Charities or non-profits?

Theresa: I am very sensitive and will always donate when there is a need. I belong to the Catholic Social Services here in Phoenix. I was on the board for 12 years. When I joined, their financial situation wasn't good. They didn't know how to raise money or how to control things. I was always in the finance department to help them out. I see things that should be done. I helped them tremendously. I'm the person that says if you use the facility, you should donate. If you have more money, you should pay more. You have to support it. That is how we all help each other.

Another time, I heard that St. John High School needed a station wagon because when they had a meet, they didn't have any cars big enough to take the children. Since I had a 2 year old station wagon, I went ahead and donated it to them. I didn't even know where the school was located. If I see there is a need, I will always give.

I was president of the Maricopa County Medical Society. If your husband applied for a medical license, you were immediately sent an invitation to join the auxiliary. This was the biggest medical society in Arizona because it was the whole county.

Catherine: Theresa, it was a pleasure meeting you and getting a chance to hear your story. Thank you for your time.

Theresa: I am very glad to be interviewed because I just love Paradise Valley. I feel that everyone who lives here should contribute somehow to make this place beautiful and peaceful as possible.