

## **Marcie and Marvin Chaiken Interview, February 2016**

The video interview is available for viewing [here](#). An unedited transcript follows.

**J:** Jill

**M:** Marvin

**C:** Marcie

J: First of all thank you very much and if you can introduce yourselves and tell me a little bit about yourselves.

M: Ok, I'm Marvin Chaiken. Sounds like chicken. My nickname is Chick as a result. All my life I've been called Chick. Marcie calls me Chick. I don't know even if she knows my first name. So that's where we are at the present.

C: I'm Marcie Chaiken and I'm very pleased to say that we've been married for many many years. Marvin came from Philadelphia and I came from the other side of the river. But it took a couple of years until he finally proposed. And we have three children. Of our three children we have two boys and a girl. Our oldest child, Eileen, is beautiful. She has come a long way. She's an executive producer for 20th Century Fox and has been acknowledged by the Producer's Guild and we're proud of her. Eileen is married, she has a partner and she lives in L.A. and Palm Springs. Our youngest son is an architect and he lives in New York. So we're very happy about our children. We've had one unhappiness in our life. Our middle child is severely retarded and he's in Philadelphia with two other gentlemen and has caretakers. Our life has been a very, very busy life, three children in three years. But I've always loved being active in something. When our youngest son, the architect, got interested at the age of 13 in minerals we became interested and we started collections. We would both go when we were invited to go to schools to talk about the minerals. And then all of a sudden the children were gone and it was time to get an interest and I said I would like to have a mineral shop. And he said, "You can't afford a shop." I'll make some shelves for you and you can start out. Well, I think that he thought I'm the nice little housewife who wants to have a hobby. And I was president of the home and school association in the high school and I sent out letters and I sold from my home at first. And he said, "Well, whatever you make that's your own money." And at the end of the year and a half I said I'm ready for my first shop. And I went to shop one, shop two and by the time I got to shop three we were members of the Academy of Natural Science Mineral Society. And I told them about my shop in Jenkintown and they said, "Well, we've been pushing our man around because we've been doing a lot of renovations." So about three weeks later unbeknownst to me he came to my shop, I gave him my card. And he called me and he said, "Can you come in and talk?" And I got very excited. Well, we went in to talk and he said can you be in in three weeks. And I said yes. I mean I wasn't going to lose this opportunity. The Academy of Natural Science in Philadelphia is the oldest academy.

M: It's the oldest academy in the country. It had many prominent people.

C: So for a while I had the two shops they overlapped but as the business grew and continued to grow at the Museum they opened a dinosaur hall and their attendance tripled so my attendance tripled. We started coming to Tucson in 1975 when I first got

interested in minerals and we would come every year for two weeks. He would take off from what he was doing.

M: This was her shop incidentally not mine. It was her business. I had my own business.

C: He would come with me to Tucson to purchase and the first couple years he was out there playing tennis with someone. What's wonderful about that show is you have people from all over the world. And he got friendly with a couple of fellows from Italy and they would go play tennis together. But eventually he spent more time with me shopping. And then one year we were told it was very heavy snow back in Philadelphia. We had to stay a couple extra days and that's when we came up to the foothills and when I looked at the foothills and I looked at the lights at night in hills I said, "This is where I would like to retire." It's very spiritual. I love it. It's just beautiful. And the sunsets were beautiful. So the following year we came out and we made a bid. The first one we made somebody outbid us but the second place we looked at we did a counter offer and we bought the home. I had to give the museum notice and I gave them a year and a half notice. And when we decided to move and I told them that I was leaving, I asked them, I said, "If you hire someone, hire them early and I will help them with their shop to get started." And also when we moved out here we invited the person to come out and I would shop with her for minerals. Now you had to carry something else besides minerals in the museum shop but basically the minerals were the big attraction there. So she came and stayed with us for year and they gave me a consultation fee for doing it. But our eyes opened up when we moved here. We wanted to find out about the fauna about all the cactus, the names and the animals and whatever was here. And we went to Tohono Chul and we took their docent course. And we were docents for about five or seven years. And we did that and we enjoyed it. And then a very good friend that he played tennis with told him about the fine arts program in the schools and the archives they had. He said, "You have to see their archives." And we went down with him and they could have a museum with what's been donated. The person who was in charge, Dr. Joan Ashcraft, she said, "You know we really need volunteers." And his friend looked at me and said, "You could be the volunteer coordinator."

M: She was elected by us.

C: So I became their coordinator and I did that for I guess about seven years and it was wonderful. They have a truck that they take things from their archives and they'll do a whole scene in there from the art department with the things that they have and paint the backgrounds. It goes out to the schools. It will park itself at a school on Monday and be there all weekend, classes will come and go through the truck.

M: And we would speak to the children tell them about various cultures, various types of civilization and field questions for them. And the fact of the matter is it was more helpful to us as an individual to understand the world around us so we enjoyed it immensely.

C: Tucson Fine Arts Awards that they have every year they submitted our names because there were different categories. We started the group called Active Volunteers for the Arts and that year when they had it we went, our name was put in along with three other couples or names. But we couldn't go to the luncheon because we're going to L.A. to our granddaughter's open house at school. But I wrote a little something just in case and lo and behold another couple went in our place and we won the arts award from them. We got a very lovely piece of glass and all. So I would say over the years we've both been very active. And he should tell you about, we both joined OLLI, Osher

Lifelong Learning.

M: It used to be called SAGE, Senior Achievement and Growth through Education and it's associated with the University of Arizona. But after a number of years we changed the name to OLLI, Osher Lifelong Learning Institution. And that's because a great deal of money was offered to us for the organization to change the name. And during the course I was a member of OLLI and SAGE for 17 years and I taught about a dozen courses down there over that period. So once again we became very much involved. Marcie also joined and we teamed up on a number of presentations. We have carried some of those things over to here. We've taught a couple of courses here and we intend to teach a couple more courses in the future. This is what we do not for the people here but for ourselves just so we can keep active like that.

C: I would say we've been involved in a lot of things over the years. I've always enjoyed working with my hands. When I came here I went to Parks and Recreation and took beading and learned Indian beading from an Arapahoe woman while I was at Tohono Chul. I also was active in an organization called Hadassah for many years. This is an organization of Jewish women and they're pretty active in the community. I was president of my group at the time. I just like meeting people. I like doing things and one of the things I love about where I am now is saying hi to everybody. I mean you can't walk into dinner without being greeted by everyone. And the activities that they have. I'm on three committees plus I'm doing painting, watercolor painting on Saturday morning. I really get lost in that. I love it and I also have signed up for a writing group, a writing course that we have. So I keep pretty busy.

J: Sounds like it. What are the committees?

M: Well, the result of all this is I became interested in lapidary work doing work with stones, carving and stuff like that. And I was cutting up gemstones even back in Philadelphia. When we moved here by that time I had cut up well over 1000 gemstones and I said, "I have to do something about this." So I took a course in silversmithing. There is an organization here in town called Old Pueblo Lapidary Club. This is an older organization than the Tucson Gem and Mineral Society. We both belong to that society too. But I learned how to do silver work and since that time I have produced a number of pieces, amateurish but the best I can do. And I've enjoyed doing it. I still do it.

C: What he didn't tell you was once a year, when they have the big convention at the convention center, the Tucson Gem and Mineral Show, the school buses come. And on the day the school buses come, that Friday morning he stands outside with the bullhorn and tells the kids how to behave and what they're going to see inside. And I worked inside I had about 13 volunteers working with me making sure that they go up and down the aisles and keep the kids still moving and watch what they're doing. But just recently this year we finally decided to give it up because I think we're doing more where we're at right now.

M: I make a joke about this, too, in talking to the children with a bullhorn, I would tell them what they're going to see and what the thing was about. And I would end the talk by saying, "One thing you have to remember: keep your hands in your pockets." These kids have sticky fingers.

C: They were fun.

M: That's what I did for years. And as Marcie said it's about time we just sit back from it so we did. We still belong to the society, The Tucson Gem and Mineral Society. We go

to some meetings but nowhere near as active as we had been previously.

J: Did it free up some of your time? When you moved from living in the house to here, did you find that you had more time to do things you wanted to do?

M: By living here? I guess there is an adjustment as I mentioned to you earlier there is an adjustment that takes place. First of all you're meeting new people, you're making new friends. Marcie and I had many, many friends here in Tucson. We both found this to be the case, they're reluctant to let us get away from them and that's pleasing to us, of course, so we stay in touch with them but we make new friends here. So it becomes a little difficult sometimes to apportion your time, whom do we see and when do we see them? But I think they understand. I hope they do anyway. I meet with my old friends about once or twice a month for meetings, just men sitting around talking. Marcie does the same thing with her old friends, too, like that. I think we've enjoyed living here. It's easy. A lot of the problems we might have had at home we do not have here but we also have different kinds of problems here. So it's a matter of adjusting ourselves to them and I think we've done it pretty adequately. I think we'll stay here.

C: One of the big adjustments was where we lived before, up in the foothills, and he got more and more into his lapidary work and it got to the point where I said, "You need a workshop." So next to our carport we built a workshop for him. I knew that when we decided to move to The Fountains that was going to be a problem because his workshop had become a lot of equipment, a lot of stuff so actually we rented a place for three months so he could gradually work it down and also we sold off many of our minerals. It's working out. I get a little upset sometimes but it's important for him to continue with his hobby. We had to make space here and out on the patio but it's worked out. I mean the fact that we have a casita that is large enough to accommodate all of these things has worked out fine.

J: That's great. How did you decide where to move did you do a lot of research, did you talk to people?

M: I think we looked at almost every senior's retirement community in the area. There might be well over a dozen. We looked at half a dozen of them. We were seriously interested in one other place at the time but just not ready to move and we came back here and over the course of years, three or four years of coming here. I think it was Grace who would constantly stay in touch with us, which was a smart move. And we brought friends out here also and they were interested but they went elsewhere for their own reasons and they were good adequate reasons. And we chose this place because we felt comfortable here and because it's countrified. It's not like we're being moved into an apartment building and we're going to be there for the rest of our lives. We can spread out here individually and do stuff.

C: There is a very nice openness about the place and we felt it was an easier transition being in a home all your life to coming here. It felt more homelike. And one of the things I love, I have to tell you this, I loved having neighbors. It had been a long time. When my kids were growing up, we had neighbors but as time went by, the places where we were and the neighbors either down here or up here, and it was such a treat for me to have people, friends to talk to and walk around and just fit in. And I enjoyed that. Many of our friends were curious, where did we move to and they would come to visit us. I have to say they were all impressed with where we are. And one in particular I said, "Do you want to meet us and go out for dinner?" She said, "No, we want to eat dinner there." So

they came for dinner and they just raved about our place compared to where some of their friends were. And they said, "This is wonderful, these people." Everybody was going by our table and waving and saying hi. "These people are so friendly." And I said, "Well, what did you think about the food?" "It was delicious." "Oh, you hit a good night." And I said, "Are you ready to move?" She was ready to move but the macho husband said, "No, I don't want to go to a retirement home." But I've heard this many times and it's usually one or the other who. So whether they will move eventually to a retirement home, I don't know but they were impressed with our casita and with the meal that we had.

J: That's great. That's great. Let's see what advice do you have for other people who may be in the big old house and considering what's right for them, what advice do you have for people and couples?

C: Well, you discussed it was some of your men and what?

M: As I said earlier to you, some of them just wouldn't even consider moving into a retirement facility. It's just beyond their comprehension to be doing things like this. It was beyond my comprehension at the time too. I don't know if there's any advice I can give to anybody about this. We're all individuals. We all make our minds up based on our own experiences. There comes a time when you realize, "Hey, maybe it's a thing I have to do." Not that I want to do it. I have to do it. The other thing is you have to say, "Can I afford it?" I think this is a very big problem for many people because it becomes costly, the initial move, but you sit down and you do your homework. You figure if we do this, that and the other thing we can afford to do this and still maintain our dignity so we make our decisions based on that. But I think it takes two to tango like they say, your wife, in my case my wife and I have to agree on certain things. We certainly disagree about a lot of things too but these are measures you have to be aware of. But there is no advice I can give to my friends. I see they resist, literally resist even discussing it. Ok, we'll talk about something else. We'll talk about Donald Trump instead.

C: Many of our friends and I laugh and they'll say, "We're going to move in with our kids. If one of us passes away we'll move in with our kids." And you know, you have talked to them about that? That's one thing we don't want to do. We feel as though our kids have their own life and especially the fact that they have children going to college and their lives are busy. Two of our children are very successful. Their time is very tight because they're so active and so busy in what they're doing. We don't want to be a burden to our children. I mean we want their love and we know they love us and we think that's more important that we have their love than having them being responsible for us.

J: That's great, that's great. Let's see, when you think back before you moved what thoughts made this seem appealing? What changes did you wish to have... actually I'm going to move your shirt a little bit... what changes did you think oh we can improve our lives this way? You know something you look forward to in moving.

M: I think I'd let Marcie try to answer that question.

C: I looked forward to not having to make telephone calls to come fix the roof, there's a leak, our driveway needs fixing, oh, we've got termites. There were so many things that come up and I would say most of our early life he was away from home a lot and I had a lot of the responsibility and I think there came a point in my life where I said, "I really don't want this responsibility anymore." And it took me a while to convince him but I just, not that I didn't do things myself, but I wanted less things to do that I didn't enjoy doing.

So that was one of the main reasons and I just thought we don't want to put this on our children as we get older and we are. I think the smart thing is to, let's look at retirement homes and let's go while we can still walk in. I find that some couples wait too long and by the time they're ready to come in, one or the other of them is really not capable of enjoying what's here for them.

J: That's true, that's very true. And what have been some of your favorite programs here? You mentioned you're on three committees?

C: My favorite programs? I have to tell you that my favorite thing is painting, watercolor painting now. Many years ago when my children were little I took them to the arts center and I tried painting and I wasn't very good. I think the teacher was glad when I quit. But when I came here, I thought I'm going to try the painting class, I'm going to do watercolors. And I do it every Saturday morning. I'm probably the first one in there and the last one out and I know I'm not Grandma Moses but I enjoy the painting. I think it's great. I just get lost in it. Enjoy that and I've been writing my memoirs for a long time but I got into the writing class and I sometimes pull out one of my memoirs and rewrite it and read it in the writing class and I enjoy that. And then the committees I'm on, I volunteer in the library and I'm on the holiday fund committee and on the food committee. I just enjoy what I'm doing and I'll probably end up finding something else or dropping out of something but I think you have a lot of very good activities here.

J: That's great, that's great. Well, I've gone through this list and even added a few more. We talked about your kids, is there anything else that you'd like to add, advice or just thoughts at all?

M: Yeah, I have advice. Stay busy, do something, and I try to get this point across to people living here who just seem to be living here waiting to die. And they're not enjoying or hating it here they're just here. And I feel if you do something and become involved in things, that keeps your mind active, keeps your body active and as a result you enjoy it more. And I think that's part of our enjoyment. We have become involved in things here.

C: On the other hand there are many interesting people! You don't realize, when you move, that you've met people who have wonderful backgrounds and really can contribute a lot.

M: All it takes is listening to them a little bit.

C: And that come from all over the country.

M: And they have a lot to offer. You're not the only one who has something to offer. And I think these are little messages we've picked up while we're here too.

J: Beautiful.

M: Got enough?

J: Oh sure.

C: And I love it if something is wrong I can just pick up the phone and call and I don't have to worry about getting a person to come out.

J: Nice that does sound good.

C: That sounds good.

M: Yep.

J: Well, I think it's just wonderful. Did it all come through? We need to repeat anything? Well, thank you.

