

Cholla Elementary School: A Journey of Growth and Discovery (1976-1979)

Introduction: A Neighboring Educational Experience

Situated directly across the street from Lakeview Elementary School, Cholla Elementary School was my educational home from 1976 to 1979, encompassing my third through fifth-grade years. Located at the intersection of 33rd Avenue and Cholla Road, between Cactus and Peoria, Cholla provided a nurturing environment that significantly influenced my personal and academic development during these formative years. The school was relatively small, offering a tight-knit community where students were able to form strong connections with both their peers and teachers.

Extracurricular Engagement: Cultivating Interests and Skills

Cholla Elementary offered a variety of extracurricular activities that allowed students to explore and develop their interests. I was particularly drawn to science and sports, actively participating in both. These activities were essential in shaping my character and interests in ways that I didn't fully appreciate at the time. My involvement included:

- **Model Rocket Club:** I initiated the Model Rocket Club, a group that was both fun and educational. We would build and launch model rockets, learning about basic principles of aerodynamics and engineering. This club allowed me to work closely with classmates, share ideas, and expand my curiosity for the sciences. My passion for science, especially the experimental nature of rocketry, would later find its place in my love for filmmaking and special effects.
- **Tug-of-War Competitions:** The school was big on team-building activities, and tug-of-war was a staple. I was always the anchor in our team, and our victories became something to look forward to every year. These events taught me the importance of teamwork, strategy, and physical endurance, all while bonding with my classmates.
- **Science and Sports Achievements:** My dedication to both science and sports was recognized in the form of several red ribbons awarded during school competitions. These ribbons were not just accolades—they served as a tangible representation of my commitment to excelling in areas I was passionate about. Winning in science fairs and sports events fueled my ambition and pushed me to seek new challenges.

Passion for Science Fiction: Exploring New Realms

Beyond structured activities, I developed a deep passion for science fiction during my time at Cholla. The genre became more than just entertainment—it influenced how I saw the world and what I wanted to achieve in the future. My love for science fiction was nurtured through several avenues:

- **Library Exploration:** I voraciously read the entire science fiction section of our school's modest library. The books became my escape, introducing me to fantastical worlds and imaginative concepts that I found incredibly inspiring. As my thirst for knowledge grew, I

began taking the bus to larger libraries, seeking out more books that explored new dimensions of science fiction.

- **Filmmaking Aspirations:** The release of "Star Wars" in 1977 was a watershed moment in my life. The film introduced groundbreaking visual effects and storytelling that resonated deeply with me. I became obsessed, often daydreaming about creating my own movies with similar effects. I started filming two-minute short films and special effects test reels, using whatever materials I could find. My neighborhood friends were often involved in these projects, though they didn't take it as seriously as I did. Still, their participation was valuable in teaching me how to work alone when the time came. This would later serve me well in the visual effects field.

School Environment and Community: A Supportive Atmosphere

Cholla Elementary was not just an academic institution—it was a community that provided a sense of belonging and support. The teachers were dedicated to fostering not just academic achievement but personal growth as well. I felt encouraged to explore my interests and pursue passions that might not have been supported at a larger school. The school environment was further enriched by:

- **Academic Support:** Cholla's small class sizes meant that teachers could provide more personalized attention to students. This was particularly important for me as I advanced quickly in certain subjects. The teachers ensured that I stayed challenged and engaged, pushing me to dig deeper into my passions, whether in science, art, or literature.
- **Community Events:** The school organized several events throughout the year, from sports days to talent shows, which encouraged community participation. These events were an opportunity for families to come together, meet one another, and create lasting bonds. It was through these events that I learned the value of teamwork and community support.
- **Diversity and Inclusion:** Cholla Elementary was home to a diverse student body, and I had the privilege of interacting with children from various cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. This experience taught me the importance of inclusion and respecting differences, lessons that have stayed with me throughout my life.

Cholla Elementary's Influence on My Filmmaking Journey

Looking back, my years at Cholla Elementary were pivotal in shaping my interest in filmmaking. The school years were crucial for the development of skills that I would later apply in my filmmaking endeavors. These skills ranged from creativity and problem-solving to technical knowledge and self-discipline. My time spent making short films with neighborhood friends, although often humorous and disorganized, gave me a taste of what it would be like to work on a film set and taught me the importance of perseverance and resourcefulness.

In addition to the skills I developed through filmmaking, my time at Cholla helped me understand the power of storytelling. As I got older, I realized that filmmaking is not just about special effects but about telling a story that resonates with the audience. The early influences from science fiction, combined with my experiments with visual effects, solidified my passion for this creative

field.

Reflections: Formative Years of Personal Development

Looking back at my time at Cholla Elementary, it's clear how formative those years were in shaping both my personal and academic development. The experiences I had—whether they were in the classroom, the library, or on the playground—helped me develop important skills that served me well in later life. Cholla provided a nurturing environment where I was able to develop confidence in my abilities and interests, setting the stage for my later achievements.

Conclusion: Lasting Impact of Cholla Elementary School

Cholla Elementary School holds a special place in my heart, not just as the site of my early education but as the birthplace of my passions for science, technology, and storytelling. The supportive environment, combined with extracurricular activities and a strong sense of community, gave me the foundation I needed to explore my interests and pursue my goals. The lessons I learned at Cholla have stayed with me throughout my life, and I often reflect on how much this small school contributed to shaping the person I am today.