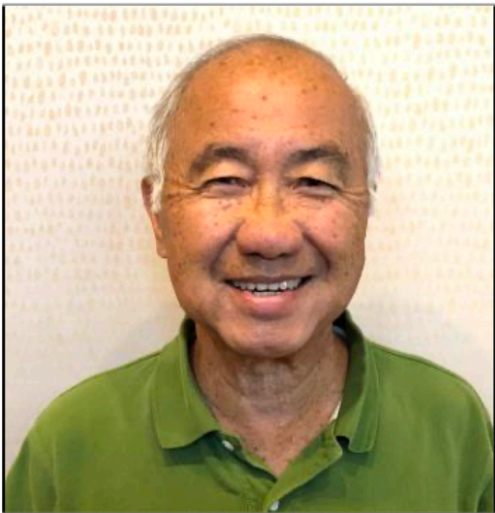


This monthly article highlights one of our branch members. We hope that you enjoy knowing a little more about your fellow members and the interesting life they have had. If you have someone you would like to nominate or if you would like to help author an article, please email the editor, Ron Nakamoto, at ron.nakamoto@yahoo.com.

RONALD "RON" LAU



"In the Fall of 1974, at age 27, with little warning, my kidneys failed. By Thanksgiving I was on hemodialysis. My prognosis for living a normal life was not good. *(Editor's note: A recent medical study found that chronic kidney disease (CKD) rates are increasing faster than the rates of all noninfectious diseases, including cardiovascular disease, cancer, cirrhosis, mental disorders and neurological disorders. Chronic kidney disease is known as a 'silent epidemic' because many people don't realize they have it until the disease is at an advanced stage. CKD is more common in people aged 65 or older (38%) than in people 18-44 years (7%).*

Reflecting back, I have to say that the first 26 years of my life were normal. I grew up in Honolulu, Hawaii as the oldest of four children. My parents were children of immigrants from Southern China. My grandparents emigrated for different reasons, but mostly for a better life. My maternal grandmother was actually brought to Honolulu as a servant and was probably given or sold to my grandfather for marriage which was typical at that time. My Dad was a butcher and later saved enough money to own a small neighborhood grocery store called 'Wings Market'. My Mom raised the kids and later worked at our store. My siblings and I spent many hours working the store as shelf stockers and cashiers on the weekends. The seven days a week grind of working in the family store was a large motivator for my wanting to go to college.

"We lived in Kaimuki which is located about a mile from Waikiki. In the early 60's we'd get to the store by driving through downtown Honolulu managing the thirty-minute drive through the local streets as there were no freeways then. I attended public schools and graduated from Kaimuki High School. I did well in all my classes but particularly enjoyed math and science. I was part of the honors programs at Kaimuki, so I did well in my SAT's. And, no, before you ask, I was not a surfer dude.

"In the 1960's, nuclear power was a budding industry so I thought I wanted to be a nuclear physicist. College counseling was poor so I went to the main library in Honolulu, scanned the college catalogs, and applied to a variety of schools on the US mainland. To my surprise, all the schools except one accepted me (UC Berkeley was only

accepting California residents). I decided to enroll at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) because of their academic excellence and they offered me the best scholarship. A new chapter in my life started with my first ever flight to the US mainland. "I travelled with a light windbreaker as my only jacket and soon discovered what cold weather meant. It was good that I decided to visit the various fraternities during Fall Rush week and pledged to Phi Sigma Kappa as a fraternity brother took me to a department store to buy a heavy coat which I used regularly for the next five years.

"In my freshman year I discovered that the life of a typical physicist was not what I wanted. Most physicists at the time were doing elementary particle experiments, bombarding atoms with particles and observing the results. I was much more attracted to the study of electrical engineering and especially the new field of semiconductors (mainly transistors) and control theory. At this time, a lot of research was being applied to mathematically model commercial processes, as business and public utility companies needed to improve production workflow, product quality and reduce cost of production. I graduated with a BS and MS degrees from MIT in EE specializing in the application of control theory to commercial processes.

"The early 70's was a bad time to look for engineering work as the high demand from NASA's "Man on the Moon" project was drawing to an end. I joined a small California firm, Systems Control Inc., (SCI) in Palo Alto. My initial interest in SCI was their pioneering work in monitoring and control systems using sensors, mathematical algorithms and software. Unfortunately, this work received erratic funding as convincing prospective clients that a computer (what is a computer?) could control a physical process was like my talking Hawaiian 'Pigeon English' to you. I shifted to working in other areas of the company. Most of this work was commercial or government funded studies that included:

How to deploy anti-ballistic missile systems? This project brought me into the world of ballistic missile offense and defense scenarios and tactics. I learned from this project that given the abilities and surprise nature of the offense, it is impossible to provide adequate missile defense to prevent large levels of human casualties.

Will supersonic transport jets (SSTs) affect the atmospheric ozone layer? This large project for the National Academy of Sciences was to assess if large fleets of SSTs might deplete the earth's ozone layer. Our group applied statistical analyses to show the possible outcome variations. It was a landmark study in the early 70's titled 'Climatic Impact Assessment Program'. Large fleets of SSTs were never deployed; however, the study was the basis for banning chlorofluorocarbon (CFC) refrigerants because of their affect on the ozone layer.

"In the midst of this budding career, I suddenly developed symptoms of eye blurriness and stomach nausea. The doctor discovered my blood pressure was 200/140. I was checked into a hospital where they discovered my kidneys were 10% functional. I was on hemodialysis for ten long months before I cleared the wait list for a compatible kidney. (The odds for a successful cadaver kidney transplant at the time were 50%.) I was hopeful and prayed for success but the transplant failed. I was resigned but to my surprise, a second chance came about three months later and this time the transplant

was successful. I regained my strength, my ability to fully perform my job, my freedom to travel without being tethered to machines, and, quite honestly, my virility. I soon returned to work and resumed a normal life. I have successfully retained this kidney for the past 44 years.

“My medical experiences from this period of my life have forever shaped the principles of my daily life: to enjoy each day’s experiences, good or bad; to never under estimate the value of good health; to be thankful for what you have; and to appreciate that everyone else’s self-declared “emergencies” are really not true emergencies when compared to life or death experiences. Before this health crisis, I thought of myself as a very independent person, not needing help from anyone else. This experience taught me the clear lesson that there are times when the help of others is essential; and accordingly, we must reach out and help others when and where we can.

“From the early 80’s to 2009, I supervised the development of software or managed Information Technology (IT) departments. I worked for Measurex Corporation in Cupertino. We developed and sold systems that monitored and controlled the manufacturing of paper sheet products. We had more than 70% of the market for pulp and paper control. We developed a batch processing application extension to our software and were the first company to create software to produce human insulin for Elli Lilly. I think that software/system is still in use. Then I moved to Octel Corporation for better growth opportunities. Octel was one of the early pioneers of voicemail and in the mid-1990s installed more than 60% of the corporate and phone company voicemail systems. In a few years I was promoted to Director of CPE (Customer Premise Equipment) software, responsible for all corporate systems. In the late 90’s, Octel was purchased by Lucent and I was ‘cashed out’ so it was time to move on to another challenge.

“I accepted a position as Vice President of Engineering for LifeMasters Supported Selfcare, a health services company. We developed software for and operated call centers that used registered nurses to provide health advice and education over the phone. LifeMasters was a pioneer in the creation of computer based electronic medical records, browser-based applications for data records, and outreach programs to educate and mitigate medical emergencies. Health insurance companies saw the benefit of the service and we signed up Aetna and a Medicare experimental project as our biggest customers serving over a million patients. I decided to retire in 2009 after a 40 years career. I am proud of all the systems I have worked on. They have touched the lives of many people, directly or indirectly, to their betterment based on the use of technology.

“I met and married my wife, Ginny McCulloch in the late 70’s. Ginny is the sister of a fraternity brother. She moved to the Bay Area for graduate work and then worked at SCI with me. We dated for about 18 months, married and have been together for some 40 years. We have three children, Kenny and twins, Amy and Jacob. We had our first grandchild born this June. Ginny and I are actively involved with the Los Altos United Methodist Church (LAUMC) in service work, group meetings, and LGBTQ community



Ron and Ginny at Hanauma Bay, HI

advocacy. On a personal note, two of our children are part of the LGBTQ community so we have come to understand and live through the issues and challenges they face every day. If you would like to know more about these issues and challenges, just ask me.

“Ginny and I enjoy travel. We have been to all the continents except Australia. I loved the serenity of Antarctica. We took up ballroom dancing for fun but stopped a year ago when I started having back issues (Sciatica, another medical story I can tell you about). I also like to putter in the garden to relax, mostly planting flowers.

“I really enjoy being part of Branch 35. I joined for the golf which I have enjoyed for the past ten years, and I was very proud to win ‘Golfer of the Year’ for 2015. I learned about Branch 35 through men I knew at church.

“My parting comment is to join as many activities as you can and interact with your fellow members as they are interesting, have come from all backgrounds, and have interesting life stories to tell. Live each day to the fullest and be kind and gentle to others. *Mahalo nui loa.*”