

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\(at\)yahoo.com](mailto:ron.nakamoto(at)yahoo.com).

## JERRY BELDEN



“Growing up in Napa... I didn’t whine or ‘wine & dine’. No, I caught tadpoles in a creek and hunted for arrowheads in the fields before all the vineyards were planted. Not to say there weren’t any vineyards at the time, but many fewer. In the 50s, Napa was a small town of 17,000. For a kid and a teen, there was plenty of freedom to roam. At a younger age, riding my bike all over town was not a problem since traffic was light and distances were not great. In high school, cruising the ‘Main’ with friends downtown on weekend evenings was a fun activity.

“As a young teen, there were no video games, and we rarely watched TV. So, we did a variety of things that kids don’t do much of today. One memorable event was the time a friend and I rode our bikes up a narrow, mountain road towards what is now Hess Vineyards. We were going to a place we called ‘Broken Dam’ on a creek beside the road. Unfortunately, my friend’s bike chain broke near the dam, so we had a tricky time getting back. He coasted downhill on his bike using his shoes for brakes and on the flats, we used his bike chain as a rope so I could pull him using my bike. We got back after dark and our parents were quite worried.

“My sense of independence and enjoyment of the outdoors was probably tied to growing up in a small town with lots of freedom and plenty of open space nearby. As a boy, I participated in boy scouts and loved going to summer camp at Pinecrest Lake. I even swam across it but got a touch of hypothermia. I’m not doing that again.

“A little more background.... After leaving the Army, my dad entered Cal (U.C. Berkeley) and I was born a couple years later at Alta Bates hospital in Berkeley. I was later blessed with two sisters. A couple years after graduating from Cal, my dad got a job in Napa at the state hospital. He was a psychologist, which probably explains my quirks and interest in other people’s problems. So, if I get too analytical in our conversations, my apologies.

“In the second grade I got an ‘Erector Set’, a great toy, which as kids some of you may also have had the pleasure of playing with. I loved making structures, which included a mini crane with a motor to hoist things. So, from that time on, I had it in my head that I was going to become an engineer. I went to Napa High, the only high school in town at

that time. Besides all the usual classes, I took all the math courses including a college Calculus course at the JC. I also played a bit of tennis and took French classes through my senior year. I later used that French on several trips in France and became a bit of a 'Francophile'.

"Of course, since my dad went to Cal, I always assumed I would go there as well. Fortunately for me, one didn't need an A+ average to get in back then, so Cal Berkeley is where I went. I lived in a 'Co-Op' which was a somewhat reduced cost housing option where all the students were assigned 5 hr. / week work-shifts such as preparing or serving meals, doing maintenance, and cleaning common areas. As a result, it was a more hang loose experience where people could do what they wanted within reason. We had a basketball court and had regular Sunday tournaments which included a beer bust my first year there.

"I majored in electrical engineering. However, in my senior year I took a couple programming classes, which I enjoyed, so I graduated with a 'Computer Option.' This was before the advent of the Computer Science degree. While going to college, I also worked at the student store to make some spending money. Fortunately, I made it out of Berkeley the year before the Vietnam protests and the teargassing started. Therefore, I was there at a rather dull time according to my wife.

"My first job out of college was at Philco-Ford Western Development Labs in Palo Alto. I took a job designing assembly language software tools including a trace/debugging tool for a new minicomputer. During my early years in technology, I worked at several different companies doing software, but shortly after the recession hit in 1970, job openings became limited. I can't exactly say how I got this bright idea, but I felt that I would like to help kids get excited about learning and off to a good start in life. This motivated me to enter the teaching profession, so I went back to Cal and obtained an elementary teaching credential.

"One benefit of getting a credential that I didn't initially realize was that it was a great place to meet young women. The men in my program were outnumbered five-to-one. It was a good move as I met Lindsay, who became my wife a couple years later. Our first date was at my apartment where I cooked her 'Mish-Mush', a dish she said tasted like its name. In spite of this, she married me and we've now been together over 40 years.

"The year after getting my credential, I taught 4<sup>th</sup> grade in Novato. Teaching made me realize that the kids in my class were the same as I was at that age, and I was conflicted about letting them get away with stuff vs. getting them to tow the line. So, after my one year of teaching, I decided to go back to work in tech partly because I felt I was better suited for it, and partly because of the better pay. My first job back in tech was at Measurex (process control systems) in Cupertino, which I really enjoyed. I was a software engineer and often the Team Leader, integrating the work of the various team members (physics group, process control, marketing, and support). I also went to

customer sites to help with system installation. In this position, I often acted as a catalyst to make everything come together. I liked that part of the job a lot.

“After a few more years at Measurex, I realized that I was actually much less of a techie, and more of a people person. And it was clear I preferred working with people in many disciplines, and at a systems level. So, for my next job, I went to work at ROLM and worked in Product Management. The first product I was involved with was a PBX-integrated voice messaging system called PhoneMail. This product turned out to be the first truly viable medium to large-scale business voicemail system. Over time, I gradually moved to working on ‘Call Center’ solutions, and eventually became responsible for managing the relationships with several other companies whose products ROLM had integrated into its Call Center solutions.

“I worked at ROLM (which was later bought by IBM and then Siemens) for the majority of my career. But a couple years after the telecommunications industry slowed down dramatically in the early 2000’s, I made a big change. I started selling Long Term Care insurance, and eventually Medicare products. That turned out to be very enjoyable, and I still help my existing clients today.

“For those of you who aren’t totally familiar with the term ‘long term care’, it is not an uncommon part of aging. Many people eventually need some amount of assistance with everyday activities such as mobility, dressing, bathing, etc. due to physical or mental decline. The fact that people are generally living longer can exacerbate this need. The cost of long-term care can be very high, and insurance is one way to help mitigate out-of-pocket costs.

“Unfortunately, in the last 8-9 years insurance companies have discovered that the prior model for providing this insurance was not sustainable, so policies have become much more limited and harder to get. Actuarial data now shows that the revenues from insurance premiums haven’t been adequate to pay claims given the greater number and length of those claims. This area continues to be a tough nut to crack. If you have questions, feel free to ask me about it.

“As for my family, I have two wonderful daughters, both married, and two grandkids. We get to see them all fairly often, since they live reasonably close by. I have told my kids from time to time... ‘Life is not a destination but a journey.’ From my history above, you can see why I believe that. Of course, being their father, my advice is only worth so much.

“SIR has been a wonderful addition to my life over the past several years. I have made great new friends, enjoyed a number of the activities, and have had a chance to volunteer and help others. It’s hard to imagine life today without my involvement with SIR! As a volunteer, I am co-author of the annual ‘hard copy’ Membership Roster with

Gordon Tong. I also co-lead the book club with John Lehner. Last, I help manage the folks who do check-in at our monthly meetings.

“Nowadays, I very much enjoy reading and exercise including walks, hiking and biking. And our dog Finn, a feisty 20 lb. mutt, keeps me going on daily walks in the neighborhood. My wife and I still enjoy trips to the Sierras and occasional trips to other parts of the US as well as to other countries. We have enjoyed some great trips to such places as Beijing, China, Peru, Canada, and many parts of Europe. We truly enjoyed our walking tours in many of the cities we visited, as well as some very special places such as along the Great Wall, several cities in Andalusia, Spain, and around Machu Pichu. We also did a 20-mile bike ride along the Danube in Austria a few years ago.

“I enjoy nature, different cultures, and people in general. I care about the environment and future generations on this planet. In spite of current events, I try to find the positive in life and I find that family and my new and old friends make it all worthwhile. SIR is certainly a great help in that regard!”



On the Great Wall - Badaling, China