

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@yahoo.com).

IAN THOMSON



My working career was centered in two areas of technology. The first was early space systems designs and second was a medical information computer system for use by hospital staff and medical professionals. I finished up my career as a CFO for a research think-tank in the field of learning in schools and corporate environments.

I was born in 1938 in Chicago, Illinois to immigrant parents from Scotland. I was a member of a family with three children, an older brother and a younger sister. My childhood home was in Elmhurst, Illinois (15 miles West of Chicago). We were a 'blue-collar' family with my father working as a machinist in Chicago and my mother a housewife.

Other than school, my childhood was filled with sports, scouting, family events and work. My early dream was to get a college degree and I knew that I would have to pay for most of it myself. To that end, I had jobs since I was nine years old saving all that I could for college. (In my younger years my older brother would get jobs such as newspaper delivery and we both did the work.) Selling Good Humor ice cream in the summer, mowing lawns, shoveling snow, delivering mail, caddie for golfers, working at a greenhouse, survey chain gang, helping to inventory, pack and move a large company were many of the types of work I did.

I attended Northwestern University School of Engineering and signed up for a co-op program which included alternate quarters of work and school. I was the first engineering student to co-op with Goss Printing Press Co. Three years later Goss had 14 students in the co-op program from several universities. The work experience included drafting, gear design, assembly work of the large presses, press assembly design, and special parts design. This type of school/work program provided me with a BSME degree and 24 months of engineering work experience. Upon graduation in 1961, I was hired by Goss as a full-time design engineer.

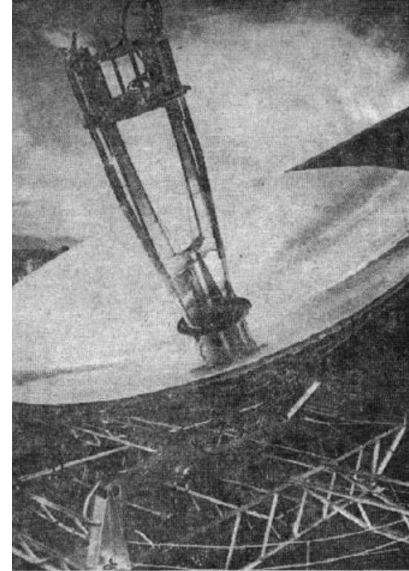
I met Diane at the local tennis courts in the summer between my freshman and sophomore years at college. She was a senior in high school in our hometown of

Elmhurst, Illinois. She also went to Northwestern University in the School of Journalism (not just by chance).

We planned to get married right after graduation and made our wedding and honeymoon plans. Everything was on plan until I received my Selective Service Draft Notice the day before our wedding. I spent the morning of our wedding day working with an Air Force recruiter to get myself qualified for the Air Force Officer School. Our honeymoon to Florida was cancelled as I spent the next three days taking mental and physical exams for the Air Force. Diane, meanwhile, was in the motel writing thank you letters for our wedding gifts. Three years later we did take a honeymoon to Florida. I fought off three more Army Draft Notices as the Selective Service was not giving up, so finally, I enlisted in the Air Force and was sent to Texas for basic training. Soon after I reported, I received a telegram which told me that I was assigned to Officer Candidate School. I finished Basic Training and then went through OCS and was commissioned a 2nd lieutenant in May 1962. Luck was now on my side as my first assignment was as a Research & Development Officer at Wright Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio for the Air Force Aero- Propulsion Laboratory.

My R&D work at Wright Patterson included managing aerospace companies developing space electrical power systems from solar, gas, liquid fuel and nuclear energy sources. Our objective was to find materials and technology that would stand the rigors of space, were light weight for launch, and were able to produce adequate electrical power for the payload. *(Editor's note: On October 4, 1957, the Russians had launched Sputnik and the space race was on. The nation, at this time was at the very early stages of space technology and development.)* I directed the design and construction of a large vacuum chamber for Wright Patterson that included an airlock for human access. This facility would be used for research projects that required a large vacuum and temperature environment to simulate space. My biggest project was the design and prototype construction of a 45-foot diameter parabolic solar collector creating up to 2,000 degrees at its focal point with full power testing of a turbine generating up to 15 kilowatts of electrical power. The test facility was in the mountains above Denver Colorado. This was the ASTEC (Advanced Solar Turbo-Electric Concept) Project.

My military assignments were important and exciting but when I was offered an early-out of the Air Force I took it and immediately moved onto an R&D job with Lockheed in Sunnyvale. I continued my work on space vehicle power systems, systems integration and design. I was a member of Lockheed's Definition Phase of the Apollo Application Program. The purpose of this program was to



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design a space vehicle system using Apollo Program hardware and vehicles. It was the start of the program to launch the NASA Skylab which did launch into earth orbit in May 1973



Skylab 1973 - 1979

In 1966, President John F. Kennedy had announced a policy to move aerospace technology into commercial products and services. In 1967, I became part of a Lockheed development team to use computer technology for the health care industry. Our studies proved that a computer centric, patient medical records system, was safer (eliminate 30% errors found in medication orders and delivery), faster (first introduction of network communication with the hospital staff, doctors and administrators), and would in the end save money by increasing productivity of hospital staff. The result of this effort was the design and development of the first comprehensive medical information system. The system was based on a medical record data base networking hospital admission, doctor medical orders, test results, diet, pharmacy, charting, discharge and patient billing. The first installation of this system was in El Camino Hospital of Mountain View starting in May 1971. This system became a showplace site for visitors from around the world. The Lockheed Hospital Information System R&D project was sold by Lockheed to Technicon in May 1971. *(Editor's note: By the early 80s other hospitals had implemented similar health information systems. By the 90s the world, led by the Japanese had centralized HIS for medical and administrative needs and expanded it to Picture Archiving and Communications (PAC) to evolve to today's Electronic Health Records system.)*

Because of my military and government contracting experience in the Air Force, I became one of the few Technicon employees with specialized knowledge in government contracting, a prerequisite for any government business. I worked on and later was awarded a contract to install a system in William Beaumont Army Medical Center (WBAMC), El Paso, Texas. This became my project to manage and with a great installation team we accomplished this in ten months including a one-month acceptance test period getting a perfect score on all test protocols. In my first meeting with the Commander of WBAMC he told me that, "Nowhere in my job description does it say that I have to install a medical information system in 'MY' hospital." He did assign a great officer to be my point of contact for him. (Note: The success of the installation and early operation of the system earned the Commander a promotion to the rank of General and a new duty assignment to Hawaii.) Along the way, I earned a Master's in Business Administration from Santa Clara University in 1971 while working at Lockheed.

Life and job were good until I was told that my next Technicon job was either in Atlanta, Georgia or Rockville, Maryland. I refused and exited the company. Life was good again when I found a CFO position with The Institute for Research on Learning (a non-profit think-tank) started by Stanford University School of Education and Xerox Palo Alto Research Center (PARC). My experience with government contracts, funding, accounting rules, policies, contract negotiations, and how to bid and submit qualifying

proposals made me ideally suited for this research institute's pursuit of government funded research work. I worked until Diane and I both decided to retire on the same day in July 1999.

Diane and I have a family of three children and six grandchildren. Our daughter is a schoolteacher with a BA and master's degree in Children's Literature. Our oldest son is an executive in a high-tech manufacturing company and also has a BSEE and MBA. Our youngest son is a medical doctor and is also a nationally recognized diabetes expert. Our children were very active in school, sports and scouting. Diane and I were always involved parents volunteering as coaches, troop leaders, and sometimes as just supportive parents on the sidelines or in the bleachers. Our vacations included car camping, backpacking, and skiing. We often took "best friends" along with our own family which added to the adventures. I give most of the credit to Diane for the quality and integrity of our children. Once in a job interview, I was asked what in my life was I most proud of and my answer was my three children.

Retirement started with hiking trips and boat cruises. We also loved to take car trips that took us to the backroads of America and Canada. We joined a local hiking group that explored most all of the Bay Area trails. I love macro-photography and soon began to identify and photograph wildflowers. I have now identified about 540 different species just in the Bay Area. My collection also covers desert and Sierra flowers. I have shared my pictures with many of my hiking friends and often point out flowers as we hiked.

As a young boy my mother got me interested in my family history. Diane and I have taken several trips to discover, firsthand, our family history in the U.S. and Scotland. I have collected copies of records for birth, death, marriage and census for my entire family documenting a Family Tree of over 15,000 individuals. Diane's family has roots back into Scotland's gentry (Lindsay Clan) who served the Scottish Royalty. We have visited several of her castles in Scotland which has been great fun. I found that the first immigrant to the U.S. in her family came from Scotland to Virginia in 1644. Genealogy is fascinating and a deeply personal experience.

I joined SIR Branch 35 in 2002 and have been active in golf and hiking. I started the hiking group and was the leader for ten years until my health started to limit my participation in this activity as well as golf. I am currently recovering from the effects of radiation and chemotherapy treatments received in 2018 but do look forward to attending our monthly meetings and visiting with friends.

To SIR, I say thanks for all the good times and wonderful new friends over the years!