

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).

LELAND CHAN



In 1979 the Shah of Iran was overthrown by the Ayatollah Khomeini. The U.S. Embassy was overrun by a mob and the embassy's American staff were taken hostage. With the change of government, Iran, now hostile, stopped all ongoing contracts with the U.S. Ford Aerospace Corporation was one of the companies that suffered work stoppage. Unable to settle our differences after years of litigation, our company ultimately proceeded to a trial at the World Court at the Hague. As the finance manager for the litigation team, I attended the trial and provided conclusive evidence of a breach of contract. The trial had three judges--one American, one Iranian, and one neutral German. After many months, we received judgment awarding Ford

Aerospace substantial monies on the case. You could say "we scored one for the home team." From the alleys of San Francisco's Chinatown into the halls of the World Court and beyond, here is my story.

My maternal grandmother was born in what was then the Kingdom of Hawaii. She met and married my grandfather, a man from China who became a seaweed farmer in the coastal California town of Cayucos. My father emigrated from China as a child and served in the U.S. Army, stationed in the Philippines during World War II. My mother was born in San Francisco and grew up to become a superb cook and head chef for the Federal Reserve Bank in San Francisco. Although we were a modest middle-class family, we did enjoy the best of foods, including the juiciest prime rib served at our many family celebrations.

I was born at the Chinese Hospital in Chinatown, San Francisco as the second of three sons. As is typical, we all grew up speaking Cantonese at home and English in everyday life. I remember my early childhood, traveling by train with my family to my grandfather's home in Cayucos and my uncle's home in nearby Cambria. We spent summers there living in homes with no electricity, gas, or water. Each morning, my mother would carry in water from the well. Kerosene lamps provided light at night. All night we heard the crickets and the mice shuffling around the roof. In the spring, my grandfather would clean the rocks along the shore with a gas torch. This allowed the purple seaweed used by the Chinese in soups, to grow on nice clean rocks. In the summer, we would pick the seaweed and lay it in squares on the ground to dry. By the

end of the summer season, the dried seaweed was loaded into burlap sacks and sent to market in Hong Kong. As I reflect back, I must say I enjoyed a wonderful childhood and learned early on that a farmer's life was not for me.

Attending public schools in San Francisco, I was a sprinter on my junior high track team and in high school, played on the tennis team and served as Junior class President. I worked during my school years as a bus boy at the historic Officers Club in the Presidio of San Francisco. Dressed in a white jacket with a black bow tie, I learned how to set formal tables and carry heavy food trays over my head with one hand. I saved enough money for college and was able to buy my first car, a new bright blue, Pontiac LeMans.

Upon graduation from San Francisco's George Washington High School, I enrolled at the City College of San Francisco studying engineering. I then transferred to the University of California at Berkeley. During my college years, I worked at the U.S. Post Office during Christmas holidays sorting and delivering mail, often in pouring rain. My summers were spent with the U.S. Forest Service at Lake Tahoe, policing campgrounds and fighting forest fires. Even though I was not on a full-time fire crew, all U.S. Forest Service personnel received training to fight forest fires. My training was put to work as I actively fought a number of fires. I remember being transported to fires on vintage DC-3 and DC-6 airplanes on which we sat on the floors. In those days, they used old B-17 bombers to dive and drop fire retardant at tree top levels. Firefighting was dangerous, nonstop and hard work. During one northern California fire, I discovered how cold it could be without a jacket, when water in buckets turned into solid ice, overnight. We slept within a foot of the fire to keep warm, so we really had to trust the person on watch to stay awake. As a teenager from a big city, my time with the Forest Service provided first-time opportunities to ride horses, fire trucks with blaring sirens, helicopters, and vintage planes.



In my forest service uniform at Lake Tahoe

I became the first in my family to graduate from college when I received my B.S. from U.C. Berkeley in finance and accounting. (I switched majors as the space race was coming to a close and many engineers were being laid off.) After Berkeley, I continued my education at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles and attained an MBA.

I returned to the Bay Area to work as a financial analyst at Ford Aerospace (then called Philco). I chose Ford Aerospace because they were at the forefront of innovation,

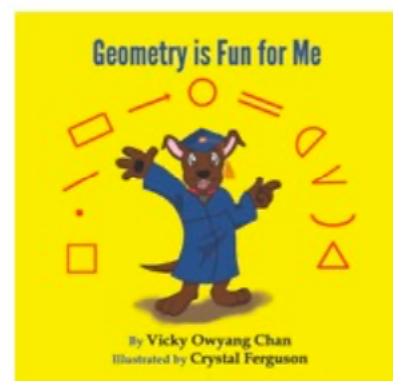
specializing in weather and communications satellites, software control systems and satellite ground tracking systems for government and commercial customers as well as some classified programs.

I progressed up the job ladder to manage finance, contracts administration and scheduling support for programs. Working long nights and 7 days a week, month after month, was common practice for me. During this time, I decided to pursue a law degree and enrolled at Santa Clara University. I've always loved history and much of the study of law is history. It took me four years of non-stop evenings, weekends, and summer classes to complete the curriculum and graduate with a Juris Doctorate in 1983. I remember having to wolf down sandwiches during breaks in the evening classes and to this day disdain sandwiches. I took the California Bar Exam that year in July. When I got the call that I passed the first time through, I was ecstatic!

My goal had always been to work in the General Counsel's Office at Ford Aerospace Corporation. I am certain that my successful performance on the Iranian litigation helped me attain that coveted position in the Office of the General Counsel of Ford a few years later. In my work as general counsel I participated in disputes at all levels of litigation, including a full hearing of one of our cases by the justices of the California Supreme Court. My work took me to many countries around the world. I processed about 200 patents during my tenure. Our group in Silicon Valley was the most inventive group within Lockheed Martin Corporation with a per capita of 1 patent for every 3 engineers. I remember one unique invention that we did not submit for a patent because we thought it was too far-fetched and out of our line of business. The invention was a process to remove carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere, which today one would consider highly relevant.

While at Berkeley, I met Vicky, the love of my life who would become my wife. We used to hang around the Moffett Undergraduate Library while "studying". She caught my eye and one day I asked her out. I took her out to a fine dinner in Chinatown and a movie, in my shiny Pontiac LeMans. We immediately hit it off together and have been married for some 45 years. Together, we worked and lived in apartments and several homes until we were able to purchase land in the Fremont hills and built our dream home where we reside today. My wife graduated from Stanford with a PhD in Mathematics Education and worked as a math teacher and math professor at various local colleges. She published her first math book for children titled, "Geometry is Fun for Me" which features our dog as Professor Brando.

Vicky and I have two daughters, Cheryl and Amanda, and one son, Alan. Cheryl and her husband Colin met while she was doing campus ministry work at St. Mary's College in Moraga, where Colin is currently a professor. Their family includes a boy and two



Vicky's First Book

girls. Amanda is an anesthesiologist at Kaiser, and her husband Jerry is a software engineer. They are enjoying their young son. My son Alan was a collegiate All-American archer at UCLA and a competitor at the 2012 Olympic Trials. He is presently an aerospace engineer at Northrop Grumman working on satellite systems.

I retired from Lockheed Martin in 2011 at the age of 61, taking advantage of a very generous separation package which was available to certain employees at the time. Looking back at my career as general counsel, I would not trade it for any other line of work. My initial work in finance had prepared me well for continuing my career in law. I enjoyed all the work and all the people I met throughout my career. I feel that it turned out just perfectly for me.

In retirement, my grandchildren have given me the greatest pleasure. Before the pandemic, Vicky and I took the traditional grandparent's role and routinely shuttled our grandchildren to the playgrounds, parks, ju-jitsu practice, swimming lessons, McDonald's, libraries and many other fun places. The bonding, we created with each grandchild is priceless. The simple pleasures like pushing each of them on swings and encouraging them to come down on slides are wonderful blessings for me.

We love traveling and were enchanted to cruise the ancient cities of Greece, the palaces of Russia, and the castles and temples of Japan. I also love to cook, and I know my culinary expertise comes from the lessons I learned from my mother. I enjoy cooking Chinese food with the wok and roasting meats like prime rib and leg of lamb in my oven, but I think I do best on my BBQ. My favorite BBQ dish and the dish beloved by all tasters is my unique BBQ lemon chicken thighs.

Vicky and I are regular church goers. As a child, I was active in the youth activities provided by Presbyterian missionaries in San Francisco's Cameron House. After a long absence from church while we were busy parenting our young children, we started to attend church again when our children were in elementary school. Vicky and I are thankful for all of the blessings we have had in our lives. After 45 years of marriage, we look forward to many wonderful years ahead.

I enjoy attending the SIR luncheons and social activities to visit old friends and meet new ones. According to the ancient Chinese proverb, "A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step." Step by step, I have taken my journey in life. Throughout my many years, I have found that it is not the destination but the journey itself that is most important.