

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.

JOSEPH “JOE” GRUBER



Editor's note: Did you know that one of our members was a Judicial Commissioner for the State of California? (Commissioners are licensed attorneys hired by the court to help with the judicial caseload. Commissioners perform judicial duties as judges with the same power as a judge to hear a court case and make legally binding judgements per California Code of Civil Procedure Section 259.) Here is his story:

"I've presided over 5,000 cases over my 40-year career on the bench. Somedays, I had up to 150 cases on the calendar. I had to be alert, quick, efficient and fair as I resolved or encouraged resolution of these cases as the next day's caseload would be the same. About 15-20% of the cases mandated a jury trial which of course took longer for justice to be rendered. In the 1980's I

remember one case that involved a DMV instructor who was accused of harassing women while they were taking their driving test. Charges were eventually filed, and he was brought to trial by a woman who was strong of character and committed to seek justice for herself and others. Her brother had recently passed and as the only remaining sibling, she wanted to make her life count by "standing up for what was right". As the trial proceeded, two other women joined her case and testified against him. He was convicted of molesting women and coincident with his sentence, he had to register as a sex offender which was a burden he would endure for the rest of his life. I was satisfied that again, justice prevailed as it often does.

"I was born in Manhattan, N.Y. in 1944 but was raised in Brooklyn then home of the Brooklyn Dodgers. My parents were from Europe, so I was the first generation born in America. I was a baseball fan and remember going to Ebbets Field to watch the Dodgers play. Brooklyn was a safe area then, so we moved about without concern. I recall playing football on our neighborhood streets and always walked to school like everyone else. Most of our parents worked so the neighborhood was always alive with the sound of kids playing together. Stick and Stoop ball was a regular staple among other activities that I remembered playing with my younger brother. As would happen, someone would break a home or car window during play, but the neighborhood handled it well as "boys will be boys" and we would always take responsibility.

"I attended Sheepshead Bay High School, did well academically and was placed in an SP class (similar to GATE class) which accelerated me from 7th to 9th grade, so I graduated early. I played in the school band and ran track. I played the clarinet with the symphonic band and played piano at home. I had a good piano teacher who came to the home and to this day, I still enjoy playing the piano. I can play from sheet music, but most enjoy playing by ear. On the track team, I would often be positioned in the third or anchor slot in relay races and remember taking home our fair share of medals.

"After graduation, I enrolled at Hunter College, which was part of the City University of New York. I still lived with my parents in Brooklyn and on my first year, commuted to school by train with my dad who got off in Manhattan while I continued to the Bronx. In college I majored in Political Science and started the "Student Activist Party" and proceeded to organize a student government. We campaigned on a platform to improve student activities and as the only party, we won. I became the parliamentarian in student government. As parliamentarian, I had to be well versed in the etiquette and procedures for rule and of course I was in charge of student activities. (I still have many friends from those days, and we get together via zoom once a month.)

"My first year I took German as one of my courses. My dad was from Austria so would regularly help me with my homework on the train and at home. After my freshman year, I was able to take the family car to school and would often pick up friends who also went to Hunter College in the Bronx. I was very involved in Student Government and often hung out with the editor and staff at the school newspaper. My college years were filled with academic learning balanced with sports, student governance, and also time to enjoy extracurricular activities like the time a friend arranged a Christmas holiday ski trip to Quebec.

"I graduated from Hunter college with a B.A. degree and decided to work for a year with the Job Corps in New Jersey. I felt it was my civic responsibility to help the underprivileged get a start in life. I became a group counselor and lived at the facility. I thought I was helping them but in retrospect I think they helped me get exposed to and deal with race relations, interpersonal relationships, economic inequity, and difficult personalities. Our curriculum was job training in the day and group sessions in the evenings. Empathy for the poor and troubled was a common feeling and breaking up tussles was a routine activity.

"Ever since I was a kid, I always knew I wanted to be an attorney. Maybe it was watching Perry Mason on TV that fascinated me about the discipline. So, after my year with the Job Corp, I travelled to California and enrolled at Golden Gate University. There were many excellent law schools in the N.Y. area, but I really wanted to experience a change of scenery and of course, the west coast weather. Once, I got to the Bay Area I visited the courthouses and marveled at how much cleaner and newer the courthouses were in comparison to New York.

"My time in California went fast between school and dating my future wife. Oh, did I not say that I met my wife while I was going to school? We met at a dance at the De Young hall where her cousin, who I knew, introduced us. As I am never one to beat around the

bush, I immediately asked her out and our first date was to the Alexis Tangiers disco near the Mark Hopkins hotel. We both had a great time together and were engaged three weeks later.

“By this time in my life, I was well on my way to becoming a lawyer with a JD (Juris Doctor) degree and was now happily married to whom I knew was my partner for life. I was content but of course, life being life, this was the time the military draft was the law of the land, so I had to pack up to go back to New York to apply for a student deferral while I attended New York University to earn my LL.M. (Master of Law) degree.

“My draft number came out high, so I was able to complete my education after which, we packed up and returned to the Bay Area. I applied and passed my bar exam, the first time through and started to work in private practice in the South San Francisco and San Bruno area. As time went on, my reputation as a knowledgeable attorney with good court etiquette, that legally represented my clients well, garnered the attention of the presiding judges.

“In 1976 I was appointed a Superior Court Commissioner by a panel of three judges and worked for the next 40 years on the bench. The law authorizing a commissioner with legal stature had recently passed in 1974 so I was one of the first group of commissioners on the bench. I often handled the custody calendar, where people arrested first appeared. Every case had its own unique circumstances and as presiding Judge, I would often go to locations to check on the evidence. I took the time because I cared about the people and always wanted to make the most informed decision, based on the facts. As far as I can remember, there was no other Judicial Officer that took the time that I did.

“A theme that repeated itself were the cases that involved domestic violence which was often sad to judge much less witness. The violated partner would often become reluctant witnesses for many reasons, so I would rely on the arresting officer’s observations along with the physical facts to form my judgement. Unfortunately, there were some cases that are brought before the court where one party tries to deceive or cheat the other party. For these civil cases I would usually rely on the power of observation of the parties and my inquisitive nature to ferret out the truth. As an example, a woman sued for assets and alimony as part of a divorce settlement, claiming she had no assets and came to court decked in her best jewelry. When questioned she claimed the jewelry was borrowed and when requested to produce a receipt, she waivered. The case was later settled out of court.

“The court calendar was always full but to break up the day, during my lunch break, I would teach a class in business law at San Francisco State and then rush back to the court for the afternoon/evening cases. Teaching business law really kept me up to date with the changes in the law.

“My wife and I retired at the same time. After, about 40 years of service, I thought it was time to retire. I am proud to say that we have been happily married for some 51 years. I attribute our long marriage to respectful communications, continuous attention to

change, and treating my wife as the special person that she is. She has always been a great cook and is very smart. On our many trips, my wife made travel easy and fun as she spoke Italian and Spanish. On our 50th anniversary, we took a family trip to cruise around Alaska. The daily scenery was breathtaking and of course being with our three children, their spouses and five grandkids made us happy and content. My son Jeremy is an attorney for a nonprofit organization and lives in New York. His wife Audrey is an ABC 20/20 segment producer and has recently aired a segment on Corona Virus. My daughter, Alexis works at Stanford in the HR organization and lives next door to us in Menlo Park. My youngest son, Joshua is a chef, has owned a restaurant for many years, lives in Oakland, and now takes care of his two-year-old while his wife, Danielle works in finance at a large bank

"In retirement, I can report that I still maintain an active life as a Voluntary Chaplain at Stanford Hospital. I enjoy learning and regularly enroll in a lot of classes in person and now online. I am an avid stamp and baseball card collector and you are welcome to ask me about my favorites in my collection. I exercise, early every morning with yoga, bike riding and walking my dogs. An active body sustains an active mind.

"I enjoy SIR Branch 35 with the knowledgeable and varied speakers and meeting fellow members at our monthly luncheons. I enjoy singing with the Trail Birds and hope we will soon be able to get back to our regular meetings. Until then, I say 'This court is adjourned. Have a nice day.'"