

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.

Gary Larson



Editor's note: This has been one of my most challenging interviews to date. It's one, that I wanted to do for several years but was delayed by world events, the subject's and his family's health and other personal challenges. With the help of fellow members and his family I was finally able to record Gary's story. To be able to capture a fellow member's life story, in print, for his family's keepsake, is a key reason for these articles. I am proud to say, here is this month's Member Profile for Gary Larson.

Gary was born in 1933 at Humboldt Hospital, the only hospital in Humboldt County at the time, built by Pacific Lumber Company (PALCO). *(Editor's note: PALCO was the major logging and sawmill company in California, headquartered in Scotia, the town that they built.)* His mother said that Gary's was a normal birth, and all was fine until thirty minutes later when she felt a sharp pain. The doctor was called back, discovered, and delivered another baby, his twin brother. Gary mused, "Those town doctors were really practiced with men and their physical injuries and not so much with women."

"My father worked in the post office and moved around to where there was a need. The family moved from Scotia to Fortuna and later to Daly City, near San Francisco where his office was the mail bus and train that delivered and picked up mail all along the small towns in Northern California. My grandfather was Italian, and my mother would often tell me stories about how he was a professional gambler in the North Beach area of San Francisco. He did that for many years and did well but knew that the longer he played the odds of his continuing to win would be stacked against him. Fortunately, just before the earthquake and fire a friend suggested he come up to the Scotia area to where he bought land that the lumber company had harvested and wanted to get off their books. He even bought the one hotel in Scotia."

"By the time I was born, he had a large ranch and as young kids we would often travel and stay for the summers. We worked feeding the sheep, pigs, and chickens. We milked the cows, bailed hay, cut and stacked the wood pile as pretty much everything then, was fueled with firewood. My brother and I would often try to finish our chores as quickly as we could so we could get out and explore and fish in the Eel and Mattole

rivers, and generally goof off until dinner. One of the only times I can recall getting in trouble was when we would take the short cut to school and hop the logs to the schoolhouse. The holding area was full of very large redwood tree trunks waiting for the sawmill so 'hopping the logs' was mostly safe. So why were those guys yelling at us?

"I attended Jefferson High School in Daily City and was active in sports, playing baseball, basketball and was on the school swim team. In my senior year the family moved to Redwood City. My brother and I didn't want to transfer to a new school, so I bought a car and commuted for the last six months until I graduated. My brother and I were in different classes, so I never saw him until it was time to drive back home. One day, the principal, called me into his office and asked where my brother was as he had not attended classes for two weeks. When I saw him, I found out he and his buddy were hopping the bus to San Francisco's Market Street area, taking in movies, and visiting the sights there and hooking up with an Air Force recruiter. I was never much interested in school. On the weekends, we would usually go out to Lake Merced Country Club to caddie. We would usually make \$2 to caddie while the occasional big tipper would pay us \$3 plus 25 cents tip for a "double bag" (carry two players golf bags). When Cokes were 5 cents, a 25 cents tip was good money and a dollar made for a great day.

"After I graduated from high school, my brother joined the Air Force and in 1952, I was drafted into the Army. This was at the time of the Korean War so soon after I completed my basic training at Fort Ord I was shipped out to Kyushu, Japan with the 24th Infantry Division."

The division was part of the U.S. occupation forces in Japan. They were the first U.S. force deployed to South Korea immediately after North Korea launched a 10-division invasion of South Korea in 1950. The division, understaffed and inadequately equipped, suffered significant losses and was subsequently moved back to Japan. Gary was assigned to the 24th Division when it was back in Japan. As a young, disciplined, well-groomed soldier, he was soon assigned to the Honor Guard for the commanding general. As part of the Honor Guard, he would drill to precision formation to serve as the division's drill team in parades and formal ceremonies and to also serve as part of the general's bodyguard.

He recalls how one dark night he almost shot an officer who did not respond to the password challenge. It was a pitch-black night and he heard someone approaching so he called out, "Halt, who goes there?" No response. he called out a second time and did not get the password, only a yell out that he needed to see the general. He recognized the voice of the Lieutenant Colonel so let him pass. The general told him to shoot the next time anyone did not respond. "It was war, and he was not kidding."



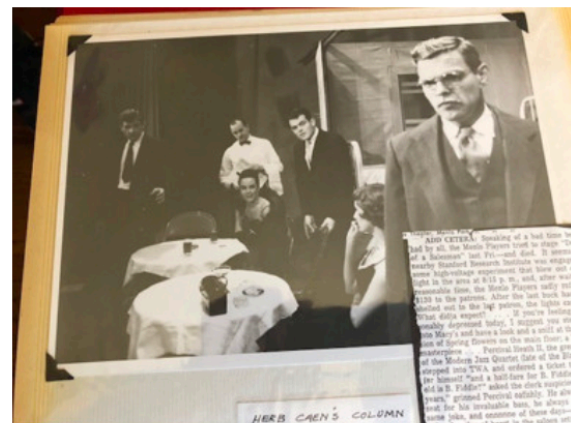
Gary in Army Honor Guard

"After I got out of the Army, I enrolled at San Mateo Junior College and worked for a while driving trucks as part of the Teamsters union. I worked with heavy equipment as well mostly in construction helping build bridges and roads. I operated backhoes, dug trenches for gas, sewer, and water lines. Infrastructure work was in demand at that time, so I became very experienced with all the heavy equipment in use from cranes to forklifts, bulldozers, excavators, etc. After some time two friends and I decided to start a heavy equipment construction company called Power Anderson. As a working partner, I became the Operations Manager for all the heavy equipment we used on our jobs. The work was intense, planning and scheduling all the crews and equipment, verifying that all the equipment was operational, keeping the crews fully manned, and keeping all the daily activities on schedule. The company did well and by age 45, I had made enough to move on, ... so I did. I sold my shares to the other partners and moved on to the next phase of my life.

"I first met my wife Carol in college. I had almost completed Junior College and was going for a visit to San Jose State College, and I found out she was going to do the same so I invited her to carpool with me to the campus. She agreed and along the way we stopped for some lunch. We hit it off and since she was dating a 'jerk head' at that time, things worked out for us. We have been married for some 61 years now. We have three children, two married daughters, Laurie, a Retail Manager with J. McLaughlin, and Kari, a retired Health Insurance Broker, and one son Brad, a Corporate Finance Head at Credit Suisse in New York. When Brad became interested in soccer, I learned the game and became a volunteer coach. The entire family became avid fans, even going to the World Cup Games in Europe in 1982. After graduation from high school, Brad enrolled at U.C. Berkeley and played on their soccer team. I have a total of six grandchildren and one great granddaughter. On our 50th anniversary we took the entire family, wife, kids, and grandkids to Lake Como in Italy. My grandfather was born and raised there and immigrated from Dongo, a city near the end of the lake. Its natural beauty and proximity to Bellagio, Menaggio and Varenna captivated me, and it is one of those experiences all of us will remember.

"One of the things I did in high school and later college, was to volunteer to act in the school plays. I enjoyed the experience and when I did have more time I volunteered at a local playhouse and have been on stage numerous times in plays like "Fiddler on the Roof", "South Pacific" and "Death of a Salesman". Can you imagine a rugged, construction worker loving acting?

"Among other things I remembered was my grandmother's cooking and so it was another thing I took up when I had more time. I especially loved to cook Italian dishes with its pasta and marinara sauces. I've coached several youth groups and enjoyed some vegetable gardening. I regularly enjoyed



Gary in Death of a Salesman, 2nd from left

playing golf with 'the boys'. I caught the golf bug from my mother who loved to play and took it up again when all the kids were out of the home. I learned to play from her and what I picked up as a caddie.

"I remember looking forward to our luncheon meetings. Since I live in Sunnyvale, very close to the Elks Lodge, I would be the one that reserved a table for the golf gang of Ian Thomson, Don Mattson, Fred Shigemoto, Dave Squellati, Ken Nix, and myself to sit and have lunch together. I always put two roosters on our table which I got from Jim Luther who sponsored me in 2000. My life has been enriched with the friendship of my fellow members. I hope to get back onto the golf course, maybe nine holes or so, sometime soon."



Gary with fellow Sirs Ian and Don at Las Positas

Use your camera to scan this QR code for a video snip of Gary and friends on the golf course. Courtesy of Andy Danver and John Ray (QR code master).



Editor's note: I wish to thank Don Mattson for taking the time to arrange and sit with me throughout our interview with Gary and Carol. It was rewarding to see and be able to talk to Gary after he disappeared from our regular golf outings. I first noticed Gary having trouble remembering his score at Ridgemark Golf Course in Hollister in 2018. It became progressively worse as time went on when I would hear that he drove to the wrong golf course. While visiting with Gary, I found him open, alert, and talkative. He immediately recites a few of his life stories without much prompting but as time went on, he would start to repeat himself. Carol, recovering from a stroke, sat with us, and was engaged but had difficulty answering our questions. Don, who recently lost his wife helped answer some of the questions from what he remembered Gary telling him over the years. This article would not have happened were it not for Don's help. I would encourage those that know Gary to say Hi to him when you see him next. One fellow SIR member helping another during his time of need, isn't that what it is all about?