

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).

Jean (John) Mordo



I was born in Egypt but had a Greek passport, although none of my family or relatives spoke Greek and both my parents were born in Egypt. I traced our family name Mordo to Corfu, Greece, where there used to be a large Jewish community. Our family spoke French at home, and I attended a French school. In addition to French, I of course, speak English, am fluent in Spanish and can converse in Portuguese. I have been a French citizen since 1965 and a U.S. citizen since 1985. I've lived in, worked, and travelled all over South America, Mexico, and across the U.S. You might say I'm an international fellow that has enjoyed a full life and am working on more adventures in my retired years.

I grew up in Cairo until age 11 when world events forced me to leave. Following the Suez Canal crisis of 1956, when France, the UK and Israel attacked Egypt to seize the canal, the situation for non-Egyptians and especially Jews became untenable. My sister and I were sent to safety at a boarding school in Versailles, near Paris. We were a little scared to travel by ourselves, but our native tongue is French with a slight Levantine accent, and we were quite familiar with France since we took our family summer vacation there. We were fortunate to have good family friends who lived in Paris, so every weekend we took the train from Versailles, where our boarding school was, and went to Paris to stay with our friends.

My dad, at the time, had a prosperous fire protection business in Egypt co-owned with his



Childhood home in Cairo



Family photo

brother. Our parents came a year later after the business was confiscated and they were allowed to leave with only clothing and some furniture. My dad, now an immigrant in France, was determined to provide for his family so he decided to restart his fire protection business with some contacts he had. His hard work paid off and our family was able to assimilate well into the local community.

I attended Ecole Polytechnique, a school in Paris originally started by Napoleon to provide engineers for his army. After I graduated with an engineering degree, I worked one year while applying to business school. I often think I was lucky not to be admitted to Harvard Business School as I was accepted to Stanford. I was happy not to have gotten what I wanted (Harvard). See my favorite quote below. I loved being in California and competed for and won a French government sponsored scholarship to pay for my tuition. I ended up graduating eleventh in my class of about 300 and returned to France to work for McKinsey in Paris, consulting in the areas of strategy and finance. Luckily, two years later, the firm was short of consultants in New York, so I volunteered to transfer to that "tough" assignment. After four years in New York, I decided to move on to new opportunities and took a job with Otis Elevator, then a division of United Technologies, in West Palm Beach, Florida. I eventually became head of their Latin American Operations and travelled all over South American and Mexico. I moved to the corporate headquarters in Connecticut as the Chief Financial Officer for Otis and later transferred to become CFO for Pratt & Whitney, the jet engine division of United Technology Corporation. One funny story when I first came into Pratt involved financial projections. I was taught at Business School that any investment return calculation above 5 years is specious, and certainly 10 years is the maximum. So, in my first week as CFO, staffers reporting to me showed me the IRR calculation for a new version of an engine. They showed me a 40-year spreadsheet! I laughed at them, but they told me: "Jean, if we do not go that long, we would not build any engines!". I found out that for a new engine, the cumulative cash flow turns positive after 20 years, and you need another 20 to have a decent return!

After Pratt, I left to become CFO of a public company rather than a division. We moved to Columbus, Ohio for a job at Scotts-Miracle Gro. I travelled quite a bit as CFO as we acquired several companies in Europe, and got the job of EVP for International, living in Lyon, France for several months following the acquisition. I love gardening and this was a great job.

I became a US citizen in 1985, the year I divorced my first wife. I remarried to Barbara, a kindergarten schoolteacher. I met Barbara through a man who worked for me at Otis Elevator in Hartford. Her marriage had just broken up and so had mine. We got married shortly after we met. She had one 6-years old daughter and I



Jean and family at Cape Cod

had a girl of 12 and a boy of 9. My kids lived with their mother in Washington D.C., but we vacationed with all the kids, usually on Cape Cod or Martha's Vineyard.

Since my days at Stanford, I always wanted to return to California. The chance finally came with an offer of CFO for Knight Ridder in San Jose. So, we came. While I realized my life goal to live in California, the business move was not the best.

The company was under terrible pressure from the competition with the internet for ads. It was fumbling, trying to buy several internet startups to learn the business. The company sold itself and the portfolio of newspapers ended up going to several buyers. That was in September 2001. Post 9/11, the economy turned down, so I decided to retire early.

I was just starting to get comfortable with the extra time on my hands when I ran into a bunch of people seeking to protect Los Altos Hills from overdevelopment. They had formed a group called Hills 2000 and were recruiting supporters. Barbara and I worked to campaign for Town Council candidates that shared our values to preserve the Town's way of life. We worked hard and were successful in getting people elected to Council and changing the direction for the Town. The newly elected councilmen now formed the majority to promote more protective policies against development, supporting walking pathways, and open spaces. I served on the Planning Commission and after a lot of cajoling to serve, decided to run for council and was elected in 2004. I served for two terms in Los Altos Hills.



Running for City Council

We downsized in 2013 and moved to Los Altos. A group of friends convinced me to run for Council in my new town! I ran in 2014 and won. During my tenure we faced some significant challenges one of which I'll mention regarding business development. At that time, our downtown shops and restaurants were languishing. The Council was divided between those favoring modest development in the Downtown triangle and those wanting to preserve the status quo-or stagnation as I would call it. The latter Council members were supported by a minority but very vocal group that fought tooth and nail to block everything. After much discussion an agreement was reached and passed to finance a \$35 million new Community Center using the City cash, without a bond issue. Local politics became polarizing and nastier over time, and I ended up losing my third reelection bid and really retired in 2018. It was a blessing in disguise, as with the pandemic and the nasty politics, I would not have enjoyed serving the last two years.

Since the pandemic, I have tripled the amount of reading I do. I read more non-fiction or historically based fiction and most recently read and loved "Homeland Elegies", "People

of the Book”, and "Agent Sonya". One of my all-time favorites is “The Book of Lost Names”, set during the German occupation of France in World War II. I also enjoy cooking. I would say my cooking is eclectic. Some of my favorite dishes are French classics such as Boeuf Bourguignon and Gratin Dauphinois. I love Moroccan cuisine, especially tagines with preserved lemons and I do a mean Pastitsio, a Greek version of lasagna.

I enjoy gardening, now with a smaller plot than before. We have several lemon and lime trees and lots of flowers. Barbara and I are looking forward to traveling again. We plan on going back to Maui in October and to Europe in March. We love renting a house in the South of France, when we visit and plan to do that in the summer of 2022, followed with a road trip through France and Italy.

Several of my friends are SIR members and all suggested I join. I have been enjoying the Book group and look forward to joining the Hiking activity to complement our twice a week hike. I am currently serving as the Branch Executive Committee Recruiting Director.

I will close with my favorite saying: “Remember that sometimes not getting what you want is a wonderful stroke of luck.” The Dalai Lama.