

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.. This is the final set of articles as we bring this activity to its conclusion. If you wish to get your story published, please let me know soonest and I will commit to working it. Contact me at ronanelaine@comcast.net..

John Kolb



Ron: *I heard from our Big SIR, Stan Barkey that you will be 100 years old this year. Is that correct?*

John: Well, as a matter of fact, I was born on November 26, 1921, so yes, I will officially be a Centenarian this year.

Ron: *This milestone is quite special and I'm sure your fellow SIR members would be very interested in reading your story. Would you tell us your story?*

John: I certainly could. Here is my story.

I was born near New Brunswick, New Jersey, where Rutgers University is, in a small town called Milltown. I was one of three kids in my family. I had a younger brother and sister. My brother was killed in the Korean War in 1951. My father worked as an accountant for the Michelin Tire Company in Milltown and my mother spent all her time raising us and keeping the home front in proper order. I attended a Catholic parochial school. I'm sure those that attended a Catholic school will identify with a typical 5th grade experience I had. We all lined up in our morning assembly and a fellow student talked to me, and like an idiot I answered and before you knew it the sister near tore my ear off. She was also my math teacher so of course I had a heck of the time with that subject, with fractions and such. Well, early on, I caught on that learning required discipline and so, that is what I did and the next year I excelled academically making the honor roll. I moved onto New Brunswick High School where one of the more practical and enjoyable classes for me was typing. I did well in "clacking the keys. As America entered the war, I enlisted into the Navy at 17 or 18 years old and because of my typing skills, they sent me to radio school where I learned morse code and got assigned to man radio stations in Charleston, SC, and Adak. Adak was a remote location with "... no trains or women". The weather was horrible between the Bering Sea and Pacific Ocean. The winds were always blowing, and you could hardly count the number of times you had a clear day. The highlight of our stay was the occasional visit of USO troops, where we would be entertained by singing/dancing girls and celebrities for which the military police surrounded the stage, saying "...don't you dare come near here." Anyway, that was Adak.

The war ended, and President Truman got us home in a hurry. My first memories of coming home on that liberty ship was climbing up to the deck at dawn and hearing the train whistle and thought oh my, it's so great to be back. When we docked, I looked for a fresh glass of milk, real milk, because the only milk we had was powdered milk, and you know how that tasted.

I was discharged and went back to work at the Bakelite Company in New Jersey. (*Editor's note: Bakelite or polyoxybenzylmethyleneglycolanhydride was the first synthetic plastic and precursor to the consumer plastic we use today. Like plastic it could be molded into any shape and was used extensively in most industries.*) I

had worked for Bakelite while I was in high school for a few months before I enlisted. They assigned me to the factory area where the air was terribly acrid. Of course, in those days there weren't too many safety and health standards for the workers. Soon after, plastic emerged as the synthetic of choice and Bakelite took a back seat to it. Today Bakelite is used for wire insulation, brake pads, and even the common dice you use in your Monopoly game.

Well, it was about that time that a girl I had met in Seattle contacted me and said she was moving to San Francisco and described the many advantages of living there. It wasn't too long after, that I sold my Ford and bought an airplane ticket. She met me at the gate when I arrived, and I stayed at a boarding home. We got together several times when she invited me for supper. She brought out some meat dish and I had to say that I was Catholic and didn't eat meat on Friday. At that time, she said that she was converting to become a Catholic and I thought "Oh Wow, let's take another look here". Well, it was about three months later that I was inviting my mother to come out to our wedding.

Her name was Sue, and we were married for 15 years and had three children together. We divorced, for three years and then got remarried again, but divorced again after three years. No one was cheating on anybody, I have to say it was just vibes, just vibes; we tried to make it, but the marriage just didn't have it, that's all. So, several years later, I met and married Olive, and that lasted for 35 years until she passed away on let's see, on December 24, 2007, so she's been gone some 14 years or so. It was a couple of years after that that I met Patty and we have been together for some 12 years now and still going strong.

Ron: *Tell us a little about your work career.*

John: I wanted to be a salesman and never made it. Sue and I wanted to go into the grocery business, so I hired on with Safeway and joined the Union and they put me through training, just learning stuff. I was with them for a year. Sue became pregnant and so I decided to buy a home in San Mateo for \$7,500 which wasn't a lot of money.



John in his U.S. Navy uniform

Along came a second child so we moved to another house in East Palo Alto for \$10,950. I moved onto Consumer Cooperative, moving to Sunnyvale. I worked in the grocery business for some 27 years, in various jobs and decided it was time to retire. By then, I owned three homes that we rented out, had a union pension, and answered my own question of "how much is enough?", by purchasing a chevy truck with a 125cc engine, adding a camper and deciding to go around the country. We had all kinds of maps and took off on a "go with the flow" road trip to New Orleans for the Mardi Gras, Bellingrath Gardens in Georgia, went to one side of Florida then across visiting Alligator Alley, on the Atlantic side, to Washington DC, visited my folks in New Jersey, spent a couple of weeks there, then onto Boston's Freedom Walk, which was great, up to Quebec, west to Manitoba to visit Olive's folks, off to Saskatchewan, Alberta then to British Columbia, where we visited Olive's cousin at his office. We waited at his office in the morning and when he came in, he asked, "What can I do for you?". Olive said "Phil, don't you recognize me?" He took another look and recognized her and was a bit embarrassed, the poor guy. Well, we spent some time at his home and enjoyed the evening together. We finished off our seven-month, 15,000-mile road trip traversing through Washington and took our time "roading" the coast of Oregon until we finally got back home. Now that was a "road trip".

Ron: *Have you ever wanted to go back to work?*

John: Heaven's No. Never, I never went back to work. How much is enough? Some people never, ... ever, have enough. They keep getting it and getting it and getting it, and there was no way in the world when I got to that point where this (the money) was going to carry us through and amen. One by one I sold a place, got good money for it, and put the money in bonds and have been using that ever since. That's it. That's the way it's been for me.

I used to tell people the only place we live 24 x 7 is right between our ears. That's, really not true. The only place I'll live 24 x 7 is with my God. So, it's wonderful to feel that I'll always have somebody here. Always, Always, that's a wonderful thing.

Over the years, I have my favorite sayings and life philosophies. I'll share a few with you.

- Don't let age be a cage.
- Don't retire, re-fire.
- Don't take life too seriously or you'll never get out alive.
- What's your attitude? Do you expect the best or the worse? What do you got programmed in?

Standby for this one, it's quick. Goes like this:

Casey drives in a big truck going down the highway and a cop stops him and says, I'm going to have to give you a ticket. your taillight is out. Casey says I don't believe you. He goes behind the truck and looks and see nothing and throws up his arms and is beside

himself. The cop says why are you getting so excited it's only a taillight? Casey says, taillight be damned, where's my trailer?

Ron: *(Chuckle)* All right, how long have you been telling that joke? **John:** Oh my god, I don't know, quite a while. I got versions both ways for men or women.

Ron: *How do you spend your time nowadays?*

John: I belong to a Widows and Widowers group. we meet every Tuesday. We have 160 members now. I was President of the group about 5 or 6 yrs. ago, then we had 300 members, so it's whittled down some. We recently met for the first time in the last 18 months. I enjoy the get together and often sing a few songs for entertainment. I've started with the SIR Palo Alto Branch and moved onto the Sunnyvale Branch when that group got too small. I've since moved onto this Branch when the same happened to the Sunnyvale Branch. I've been a member of this branch since 2014 and have been an SIR for about 30 years. I enjoy it very much and look forward to being together again and singing with the Trail Birds. I could not go to their practice sessions but as I used to play the organ, I would get the tune the night before and would be able to get with the group on meeting day.

I love to sing and did so at my great grand daughter's wedding in Roseville. All my family knows I like to sing so the MC invited me up to sing. It took a little while for me to get onto the stage but when I did, I belted out an oldie but goodie that went like this ... "Oh, when you're smilin, when you're smilin', The whole world smiles with you" Everyone loved it and the MC asked me to sing another song, so I sang one of my favorites "Hey, good lookin ... What you got cookin ... How about cooking something up with me-e-e-e." There was a lot of applause and I felt happy and loved.

Ron: *How many grandkids do you have?*

John: Oh, I don't know, I have three children and they had children, and now their children have children. I have three great-great grandchildren now. I remember all my grandkids birthdays and for Christmas I give them \$50; up until age 18 and then I told them, I must think about others coming up. After that, they should just appreciate the moment.

Ron: *How did you learn to use the internet?*

John: Yea, oh gosh, well, good question, hmmm ... my son, Jack got me a PC and cell phone for me, which I love, of course. I learned to Google and ask Alexa, and she always comes back with an answer. I love all this new stuff; I think that keeps me going. I think that people that have dementia, kind of bring it on to themselves. I think the brain is something you have to use just like any other part of your body, or it will atrophy. I take care of my home, I do my own washing and ironing ... well, not ironing, no. I take care of the outside, the vines, and bushes. I'm right across from our clubhouse and swimming pool. I exercised a lot early on, with Jack LaLanne on TV and now just keep

moving around doing stuff, which is good exercise. Just keeping active is good and I must take care of myself.

Ron: *What do you attribute your long life to?*

John: Well, for one, my parents lived to 89 and 92 years old so I have some good genes to start.

You know as you get older you just shrink, I used to be 5' 11" now I'm 5' 9", that's the way it is. Yes, I am 5' 9" and weigh 140 lbs. If I get one pound over, I say to myself, WHAT DID YOU EAT YESTERDAY? DON'T EAT IT TODAY! THAT'S IT, EAT LESS TODAY. I believe in a clean mouth; I think that's extremely important. What do I mean by a clean mouth? Well, I brush my teeth with an electric toothbrush twice a day and at night I floss my teeth and use a mouthwash. And yea, I keep a nice clean mouth as a lot of germs gather there. I have some hand sanitizers in the house and yea, I had my three shots, yes, all three ... and my flu shot.



*John receiving World War II
Veterans Recognition Certificate*

Ron: *Do you drink?*

John: No, no, no, ... well we visit Patty's daughter every Sunday for dinner, and they always have wine. So, I have a measured amount (a very tiny bit) and take it with my food so it's fine. A full glass of wine, ... no, no, no, no, no, no.

I eat meat, but not a lot of it. Patty and I often visit the Mountain View Senior center for lunch which used to be \$3 but now is free. I like to sing there sometimes.

I always have an extremely good breakfast. I eat like a King for breakfast. Why, because you haven't had anything in your stomach for 8-12 hours. Food is energy, so give me some. That's the big meal. For lunch, you eat like a Queen and for supper you eat like a Pauper, and of course, nobody does. What do they do? They don't eat until 8pm and when they eat out, they don't even get to the restaurant until 7pm, dumb, dumb, dumb. Well, I got a little excited here, but that's the way it is. Hello!

Ron: *What's a good breakfast for you, eggs and bacon?*

John: No, no, my breakfast consists of grapes, maybe five or six, maybe ten blueberries, half a banana, vitamins, some milk, and I've learned to blend it into a smoothie drink. When I get up, I do enjoy a cup of coffee which I call "water with an attitude". Good for the brain works.

Ron: *What do you do for entertainment?*

John: Well, we have our favorite programs, I enjoy watching some TV, like FBI, CNN news, Bluebloods, and Chicago PD, Fire, and MD. I do like to know what's going on in the world. All are good.

Ron: *Do you have a parting message for your fellow members?* **John:** Well, I would say this:

- I think life is an exquisite privilege.
- And the word I love is determination
- Another one, goes like this; Do not regret growing old, it's a privilege, denied to many.
- Live your life and forget your age.
- I've seen better days, but I've also seen worse.
- I woke up with some aches and pains, but ... I woke up.
- My life may not be perfect, but I am blessed.

Ron: *Well, John, it was a pleasure chatting with you and I marvel at how attentive you have been throughout our conversation. Early congratulations on your upcoming birthday and I hope to be able to meet you at our next meeting in January. I understand from Stan Barkey that the branch will be honoring you with an SIR Century award.*

John: Well, thank you and I hope to be able to sing a song along with the Trail Birds then. Goodbye.

Editor's note: To give you an appreciation of the incredible journey John has lived through; I'll note a few of the major events and trends that have transpired over the past 100 years.

1920's: The Roaring Twenties - Flappers, Jazz, and the League of Nations. Ford sold 15 million Model T's. America's population reaches 100 million.

1930's: Star Spangled Banner becomes the official national anthem. First year of the Great Depression. The Social Security Act enacted. The golden age of Hollywood. World War II starts.

1940's: World War II major battles. Pearl Harbor. Manhattan Project. Atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan. The war finally ends. Marshall Plan. Berlin blockade. Transistor invented. 1950's: Korean War. Rock and Roll music enters the mainstream. Elvis. Disneyland opens in California. The first US atomic power station goes operational in Pennsylvania. Sputnik. Queen Elizabeth coronation.

1960's: Soviet achieves first person in space. OPEC is created. Construction of the Berlin Wall. Beatles "Love Me Do". First episode of Star Trek airs. America lands the first men on the moon. Vietnam War escalates. ARPANET.

1970's: US population reaches 200 million. Kent State University. Watergate crisis and the resignation of a Vice President and President. U.S. Bicentennial. Star Wars premiers. Three Mile Island. The Iran Hostage Crisis.

1980's: "The Computer" is named Time Magazine's Man of the Year. AT&T breaks up into 22 Regional Bells. First female Vice- Presidential candidate. Chernobyl disaster. Challenger Space Shuttle explosion. Black Monday, stock market crash. Berlin Wall falls.

1990's: The Gulf War: Operation Desert Storm. Oklahoma City Bombing. World Wide Web debuts. Impeachment of Bill Clinton. Grunge and hip hop. Dot-com bubble.

2000's: Dot-com bubble bursts. Enron, WorldCom scandals precipitating the Sarbanes-Oxley Act. World Trade Center terrorist attack 9/11. US reaches 300 million. George W. Bush narrowly wins over Al Gore. Space Shuttle Columbia disaster. First US black president

2010's: Boston Marathon terror bombing, al-Qaeda and ISIS leader hunted and eliminated. Real Estate Billionaire elected president. U.S. House impeaches president. Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster. First photo of a black hole.

2020's: First patient in the US is diagnosed with coronavirus. First vaccines approved by FDA. New president. John Kolb's 100th birthday!

Happy Birthday, John! How about another decade or so?

