

Chapter 12: Moving Away from Silicon Valley

After I completed my memoir in the spring of 2013, the curator of the HP Memories website agreed to post several abridged chapters of the second volume on their site. Both of my books may also be downloaded free of charge at:

https://www.hpmemoryproject.org/timeline/les_besser/hurdling_to_freedom_00.htm

I am grateful to HP for their generous offer, and I appreciate that several thousand people have shown interest during the past years and accessed the books from their site.

Our family's life has changed significantly since I first published the books, and I added this chapter to Volume 2 to cover the most significant events of 2013-2024. Of course, I might do that again sometime in the future.

Susan, the Author

For two years, Susan participated in a series of unique classes called Guided Autobiography (GAB) to complete her 150-page book, *Keeping the Faith*. Rather than telling her story chronologically, it is organized by various topics, such as "Daddy Dearest" (relationship with her father), "Little Miss Helpful" (her eagerness to help others), and "Trust and Betrayal" (first major disappointment), among others. She is an excellent writer, and everyone who read her book loved it. One part, however, required unexpected changes.



Left to right: Susan's book, with her beautiful smiling face on the cover; Reading a section in her GAB class; Susan's grandparents, Opa and Oma, married in Oakland in 1900.

Here is what she wrote about her German-born grandfather, Opa, who lived in Oakland during the early part of the twentieth Century:

Opa loved music, especially opera. On Saturdays, he would dress up in his finest, put a boutonniere in his lapel, and take the ferry to San Francisco to enjoy music in the Opera House.

After her Cousin Dorothy in Washington D.C. read the book, she called us immediately. When Susan asked how she liked the book, Dorothy dropped a bombshell: "Susan, Opa never liked opera."

"Why else would he dress up fancy and go to San Francisco every Saturday?" Susan asked with disbelief in her voice.

"He visited the ladies of pleasure in a certain part of the city," Dorothy replied, laughing.

Susan's book now includes both the original and the updated version.

Considering a New Lifestyle

A friend and former colleague, Zvanko Fazarinc, called me sometime after my retirement. "I've sold my Palo Alto home and moved into a retirement community near Stanford," he said. "Let's have lunch here one day and catch up with everything. Bring Susan, too," he added. We agreed to meet the following week.

I'd heard about the Hyatt Vi, a Continuing Care Retirement Community (CCRC), where my friend lived. Before my former brother-in-law (Dave Bogart) retired, he was the head of their Physiotherapy Department. Susan and I had often driven by the apartment complex across from the Stanford Shopping Center but had never been inside. Naturally, we were both eager to see how retired people lived there.

Zvanko greeted us in the reception lobby and gave us a thorough tour of the facility. The 600-plus residents live in upscale apartments—ranging from studios to three-bedroom penthouses. The complex has many recreational facilities, including a gym and swimming pools inside and out. In addition, well-appointed meeting halls, a large movie theater, a computer room, and a beauty salon are just steps from the residences. Of particular interest was a well-equipped library with a special section for books authored by residents—some of whom were Nobel Prize recipients. The Vi's activities calendar was loaded with exciting programs: presentations, lectures, and guided tours. Our delicious lunch was served in one of the spacious, elegant restaurants. The entire facility was clean and impressive.

I liked the idea of the residents participating in activities without driving to another location. Life without grocery shopping, backyard chores, and home maintenance also appealed to me. "I am ready to move here," I said to Susan on our way home.

"Oh no, we are not ready for an old-age home," she replied. "Didn't you see all the wheelchairs and walkers parked outside the restaurant?"

She was correct; the average age of the residents we saw seemed to be in the high eighties. Some of them couldn't even walk unassisted. At that time, I was seventy, and Susan was sixty-five—both of us fit and in good shape for our ages. I did not push the idea any further.

However, moving to a Continuing Care Community became more appealing as we started exploring the options for our "old age." Living in such a place would be a gift to our children; they would not be burdened with looking after us as we age. Growing older in our large Los Altos home, as some neighbors had done, did not appeal to us.

Another consideration was the hot residential housing market in Silicon Valley. As the cost of homes in our area rose higher and higher, Susan and I began to talk about cashing in on the capital gains of our large house, downsizing, and moving closer to our grandchildren in the San Diego area, where housing prices were 60- to 70 percent lower.

Finally, the prediction of another significant earthquake looming over our region bothered us. The San Andreas fault line runs less than two miles from our house. The 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake served as an early warning, shaking us physically and emotionally.

In early 2012, we contacted realtors to find a home for us in the San Diego area. Our ideal home would be a single-level, low-maintenance type, recently constructed and located in a good neighborhood—close to shopping and medical facilities. However, finding a house like that was far more difficult than we assumed. Newer developments generally spring up far away from established shopping areas and hospitals. Those homes are also large, with two stories. Even after renting a condominium in Rancho Bernardo for a month to see what was available, we still

could not find the right place. The realtors kept us in their active files and occasionally called us with new leads; we occasionally flew down south to evaluate. Nothing appealed to us, so we just waited and hoped for the right home.

A TESLA in Our Garage

During the summer of 2012, the two founders of Tesla, Martin Eberhard and Marc Tarpenning, gave an eye-opening presentation about electric car technology to our IEEE retired engineers' group. They compared the energy efficiencies of various automobile power sources: conventional combustion, biofuels, natural gas, hydrogen, plug-in electric, and hybrid—from power generation to actual driving—and convincingly demonstrated the advantage of electric car technology.

Someone in the packed auditorium argued that although electric cars do not produce harmful emissions, the power plants that produce electricity do. The speakers quickly countered by pointing out that the electric car maintains the advantage even when coal is used to generate the power. At the same time, they lobbied to replace coal with renewable, clean energy sources throughout the world.

The presentation left a deep impression on me. When Susan and I were ready to retire our third Prius in 2013, we test-drove a Tesla Model S. The quiet ride, instant smooth acceleration, a 17-inch LCD control panel, and simplicity of the mechanical structure convinced us to order a Tesla. With our selected 60KW battery options, they promised a 200-mile driving range without recharge, which sounded reasonable. The company already had several free charging stations along the major highways so that we could visit our grandchildren in San Diego with only two stops. For its size, the car had generous luggage space and comfortable space for Missy in the rear of the cabin. The “frunk,” as they call it—a front trunk under the hood—also had room for two standard suitcases.

After installing solar panels on our home's roof and an electric battery charging station in the garage, we eagerly awaited delivery news. When the call finally came, a friend took us to the factory at Fremont to pick up our fire-engine-red vehicle. Susan generously allowed me to drive first. Halfway through the 30-minute trip, she enthusiastically took over.

Driving the Tesla was an absolute joy. The low center of gravity created a safe feeling through cornering. When we released the accelerator pedal, regenerative action slowed the car and simultaneously charged the battery. As we passed other vehicles on the highway, people often turned their heads to stare because, in 2013, Tesla was still a rare specimen. We quickly became the envy of our neighbors as well. *Our only mistake was not buying Tesla stock because its price increased 100-fold during the next ten years!*



Picking up the car at the factory; Our custom license plate: Zero CO₂; Charging in our garage.

Within a few days, we adjusted to driving the Tesla and only used our Lexus SUV when the larger cargo space was required. Tesla's door handles are unique because they are flush against the car. They only extend when they sense the fob is nearby. The intelligent sensors also automatically turn the car on upon entrance and turn off everything when the driver leaves with the fob. This clever feature, however, frequently led to problems for me when I drove the Lexus and forgot to switch off the engine before walking away. Fortunately, nobody took advantage of my absent-mindedness by stealing the car.

A Fast Decision to Move

In the spring of 2014, son-in-law Jim's father passed away, and we flew down to Carlsbad, California, for the memorial service. While driving on El Camino Boulevard later that day, I noticed a large sign outside a housing development: "La Costa Glen, A Retirement Community." Despite our previous frustrating housing search, I told Susan, "Let's go in to look." To my surprise, she agreed.

An attractive and friendly marketing employee showed us around the facility. Instead of having only four-story apartment buildings like the Vi in Palo Alto, La Costa Glen (LCG) also offered various floorplans of two- and three-bedroom villas with attached garages. The community had about 850 residents; the restaurants, libraries, entertainment, and exercise facilities looked compatible with what we saw at the Vi. The saleslady showed us different living units—apartments and villas of various sizes. We appreciated seeing the units completely furnished and chatting at length with the residents. They all seemed to be happy and healthy, and they expressed their enjoyment of living at LCG. Susan and I were impressed with what we saw and heard.



Aerial view of the La Costa Glen Retirement Community, located in Carlsbad about three miles from the ocean. The red tile-roofed buildings form a unique cluster with distinct Southern-California style. A convenient large shopping center is within walking distance, just across the street. (Our future villa is just above the yellow dot, near the bottom of the picture.)



L to R: LCG facilities; One of the courtyards; One of the libraries; Fitness Center / indoor pool

Next, the saleslady took us through their large healthcare center, GlenBrook, which included Assisted Living, Skilled Nursing, and Memory Care. She explained that LCG residents may move freely to the GlenBrook without increasing fees when needs arise. Recalling the problems some of our senior friends had faced as they pursued suitable and available care facilities after

a stroke or significant fall, our interest perked up. We knew that we each might require more care than the other could provide in the future.

“Does La Costa Glen look like the right place for you to live?” the saleslady asked at the end of the tour.

“Please give us a few minutes to talk about it privately,” I replied, hoping Susan would also consider moving there.

“It’s lunchtime. Let me take you to one of our restaurants and let you discuss it there,” the saleslady suggested. We agreed.

I noticed Chicken Schnitzel on the menu, a meal we both like. After ordering it, Susan and I exchanged our impressions of the facility. By the end of lunch, we concluded that neither of us had seen anything we did not like. Because we had been considering the relocation for some time, moving 600 miles from the area where we’d both lived for nearly a half-century did not scare us as much as we expected.

“It’s modern, clean, and close to our grandchildren,” said Susan. “Let’s find out the costs and availability.”

“I would only be interested in a villa. The apartment section did not have a garage underneath, and parking our cars elsewhere doesn’t appeal to me,” I replied. In agreement, we proceeded back to Marketing. During the next hour, we learned more about becoming residents of LCG. Their health and financial requirements did not pose a problem for us, but the villas had a two-to-three-year waitlist.

“We also have a brand-new retirement community in Pleasanton with available villas,” said the saleslady, sensing our enthusiasm was fading. “Our Stoneridge Creek (SRC) facility is less than a year old. Living there temporarily would place you higher on the priority list.”

“That’d mean moving twice,” I objected.

“True,” she replied. “But the villas of both places are virtually the same. The second move would be straightforward.”

She showed us the floorplans of the villas, and we saw that she was right. Downsizing from our five-bedroom Los Altos home with its large backyard to a three-bedroom SRC villa with a small patio would require careful planning and much work that we could not avoid. After living at SRC, once a villa opened at LCG, a specialized moving company could handle the relocation easily.

The saleslady’s reasoning made sense. In addition, our physician son, George, lived in Pleasanton. Living close to him for a while would certainly be nice. We completed the required paperwork, made a down payment that placed us on the waitlist, and flew home with a strong sense of accomplishment.

Visiting LGC’s sister community in Pleasanton was also an enjoyable experience. SRC opened in 2013 with nearly 600 residents and several unoccupied villas. Owned by the same company, the requirements and rules of the two developments were nearly identical. The facilities were even more impressive. For example, their state-of-the-art meeting hall could comfortably seat more than 300 people. Their sparkling clean woodworking shop was equipped with modern new machinery. PC and Apple-equipped computer room was open 24/7 to residents. The large dog park even featured a fake fire hydrant to please the male dogs.

The condominium where George lived was within a five-minute drive from SRC. He and his wife came over to look at SRC and liked it as much as we did. Given their positive assessment,

it did not take too long for us to decide to move there.

We spent a day puzzling over the available three-bedroom villas and finally chose one that faced a beautifully maintained shared backyard. The entire community used recycled water for irrigation, so even at the height of the California drought, all the lawns and plants looked magnificently healthy. Following our request, the owners agreed to fence in part of the backyard for Missy but declined to cut an indoor/outdoor dog passage into the wall for her. (We had one in Los Altos that allowed her more freedom to go in and out when we were away from home.) They allowed us to choose appliances, floor and window coverings, and paint colors. They installed a charging station for Tesla in the garage. Susan and I excitedly looked forward to entering the sparkling, clean home.

Selling our home in Los Altos was easy. Even though prices had escalated sky-high, the available Silicon Valley housing shortage created many eager buyers with cash who thought nothing of bidding above the asking price. Realtors would only talk to prospective buyers if they had cash or preapproved guaranteed loans. Our home was sold “as is” one day above the listed price, without contingencies.

Once we decided to move to SRC in Pleasanton, downsizing our large home in Los Altos was a top priority. What to keep and what to toss was a challenge. Our new three-bedroom villa offered half as much floor space with a somewhat smaller garage. We carefully measured our new villa's closet space and room sizes, then set about discarding. Thirty years of accumulated “stuff” slowly found its way to family, friends, charitable organizations, and recycle bins. Expecting a significant capital gain on the house that year, those charitable deductions would come in handy for tax purposes.

At the beginning of June 2014, less than two months after deciding to relocate, we contracted a moving company that showed up with two large trucks to take us to Pleasanton! They packed the furniture and boxes with amazing speed, leaving Susan and me alone in the empty house. With teary eyes, we said farewells to neighbors, and in our two cars, we followed the trucks to Pleasanton. In less than an hour, we all rolled into SRC. Some curious neighbors met us when we arrived, offering advice and directions. Our lives undoubtedly took a new path, and we hoped to be ready for it.

A New Addition to our family



Finn is sitting at six months, Playing with Cousin Matthew, Held by little mommy Madeline.

Our big move was only one of the significant family events of 2014. Just over ten years after

their daughter Madeline came into the world, son Kent and his wife Joan added a boy to their family. Baby Finn made his appearance on September 6. Adorable, super-active, and playful, Finn's joy for life is highly contagious; he keeps all of us on our toes. His big sister, Madeline, is pleased to be an "only no longer"; she now has a sibling. Madeline's babysitting skills have been sharpened with Finn in the family, and all breakable objects have been hidden safely in the attic. There is never a dull moment when Finn is nearby!

Parting with My Sister

My sister, Éva, lived close to us. Her sixty years of heavy smoking have led to a severe case of emphysema and eventually to COPD. The diseases slowed her lifestyle considerably and forced her to use oxygen. Living on the second floor of a condominium required climbing stairs, which became increasingly difficult. Gradually, her driving skills deteriorated, and we noticed several dents and scratches on her car. One plane trip to North Carolina to visit her daughter and grandchildren almost required an emergency landing during the flight due to her breathing complications. We all had to face the sad fact—she could no longer maintain independent living.

Once we decided to move in 2014, Susan and I reviewed with Éva two options for her: either come with us to Pleasanton and eventually San Diego or relocate to North Carolina, where her daughter and grandchildren lived. Both alternatives had some negatives.

If she came with us, she would rarely be able to see her daughter and grandchildren because of the difficulty she had with flying. Moving to North Carolina would mean giving up the Bay Area climate and physical and emotional closeness to Susan and me. Since Éva came to California in 1985, we have lived near each other and worked together for about 20 years. Losing the close sibling relationship with me would be difficult for all of us.

After weeks of agonizing, she decided to move to an assisted living facility located near her daughter in North Carolina. Although the choice hurt me, as a parent, I understood that being close to her daughter and grandchildren had to come first. Susan and I helped her with all the relocation tasks and, with teary eyes, escorted her to her last flight out of California.



L to R: 1) Éva's 81st birthday with granddaughter Evike, taken a few days after her move to North Carolina; 2) Her health decline was apparent 18 months later; 3) Éva's daughter Debbie's extended family photo, with all six teenage kids.

Éva's new home, Caroline House, is a three-story Durham building near her daughter's family, Debbie. At first, seeing her grandchildren more often had perked up Éva, but eventually, the long-

distance move and the related physical and emotional strain took a toll on her. Forced to give up driving was another blow. When I visited her a year later, the change in her condition was shocking—it seemed like she had aged 20 years. The orderly who took me to Éva asked me if she was my mother!

To make matters worse, she fell and broke her hip. Due to her poor health, the doctors declined to perform surgery on her. Unable to walk again, she remains bedridden indefinitely at a skilled nursing facility, weighing only 75 pounds. All we can do now is pray to God to make the remaining days of her life comfortable and without pain.

Life at a Retirement Community in Pleasanton

Thankfully, Susan kept track of the contents of the nearly 200 moving boxes and meticulously grouped them by their intended locations, using different colored labels. We also prepared a detailed villa map to show the location of the furniture for the movers. These turned out to be extremely helpful later during unloading.

Darkness had set in by the time the movers unloaded everything. Son George and his wife Erica came to assist and brought food for our refrigerator. They also helped us set up our bed before they went home. Exhausted after the long day, Susan and I went to sleep in our new bedroom next to the stacks of boxes.

A welcoming committee greeted us the following bright, sunny morning and took us to breakfast. We learned that they had lived at SRC for less than a year, and the moving experience was still fresh in their minds. They all wore small nametags, a practice we quickly adopted; they helped memorize names. Susan and I felt accepted and agreed that coming here was the right decision.



L to R: View of the SRC Clubhouse and the inner courtyard, the indoor swimming pool, and the front view of our new home, showing the typical blue sky and newly planted trees.

Within a month, we emptied the boxes, mounted the pictures, learned the layout of SRC, became familiar with the neighborhood, and settled into a new daily routine. Being an early riser, Susan took Missy for an hour's walk at one of the nearby open fields in the Pleasanton-Dublin-Livermore tri-city region. When they returned, we all had breakfast at home. Susan would then go to swim class while I worked out in the spacious, well-equipped gym within a few minutes' walk from our villa. Lunch at home would be followed by various activities: yoga, table tennis, sewing, and computer work. I would then take Missy for another walk at a substantial nearby sports complex, surrounded by large open fields, where she had a humiliating experience on the first day of our walk.

In the backyard of our Los Altos home and at one of the nearby parks, Missy frequently encountered squirrels that she loved to chase. Generally, the squirrels found refuge by climbing a tree or fence, where she could not follow. Occasionally, they met in open fields, where the short-legged squirrels could not match Missy's blazing speed. Blood was never shed, but wildly shaking the poor little creatures quickly moved them into "squirrel heaven." Missy then proudly brought the victim to us to show off her prowess.

In the open fields in Pleasanton, giant jackrabbits replaced the squirrels. Not knowing the difference, Missy immediately chased the first one she saw. About a hundred yards later, she returned exhausted with a humiliated look, admitting that these new kinds of "squirrels" were much faster than the ones in Los Altos. Of course, she did not give up hope but never succeeded in catching one. Those chases, however, kept her in excellent shape.

I developed a close relationship with the fitness coordinator during my daily workouts. After he nominated me to the Fitness Committee, I was elected the Co-Chair. Our committee developed program recommendations to improve the general fitness of the residents.

Before coming to SRC, I rarely had the opportunity to play table tennis—a game I learned in my childhood and always enjoyed. Occasionally, someone set up a table at Los Altos block parties, but the level of play was at the beginner level. Well, it was a different story at SRC! The first person I played was a five-foot-two-inch Chinese-American man a year older than me. Looking at him before we started, I assumed an easy victory, but after hitting the first few balls, I realized he was a far more experienced and accomplished player. Fortunately, he did not mind the skill-level difference and agreed to play with me regularly. During the next two years, "Master Han" helped me to become a much better player, and I appreciated his expert coaching.



The top four SRC table-tennis players; My sleep presentation for the residents; Portrait in 2015

The meal plan was one of the many benefits of living in a CCRC. Each person received 30 meal credits a month; they could be used for breakfast, lunch, or dinner but couldn't be carried over to the next month. We used the credits primarily for dinner in the elegant restaurant or casual lounge. Arranging to dine with other residents allowed us to become acquainted with many fascinating people. Occasionally, our children also visited and shared meals with us.

Susan joined the Livermore Presbyterian Church with other new friends from SRC and soon started singing in the choir. She also joined a women's Community Bible Study group that met weekly in Pleasanton. After the first year of our residency, she became a Villa Representative and sang with a small group of residents to perform at various functions. Although she had downsized much of her fabric and sewing equipment, she continued to quilt and sew, soon joining the Quilting Club. They worked on several projects, including providing the SRC veterans with personalized

quilts on Veterans Day.

Recognizing that many of our neighbors had various problems with sleep, I gave a presentation on that subject in the large ballroom/meeting hall attended by 130 residents. That led to organizing a sleep club. We had regular monthly meetings to hear outside speakers and to share our experiences. I also made frequent “house calls” to help residents learn how to live with their CPAP machines.

Those house call activities gradually increased when residents learned about my familiarity with computers, audio equipment, and remote controls. It all started during dinner with one of our neighbor couples, and they complained about the interface between their audio system and TV.

“We have a great set of speakers but can’t use them with the LCD TV,” the wife said.

“Les can probably help you with that,” offered Susan.

“Our son is handy with electronics, but even he couldn’t solve the problem after we moved here,” the husband said.

Of course, I could not turn down such a challenge and showed up the following day at their place, hoping to find familiar equipment. As it turned out, their high-end Bose was new to me, and it took me several hours to get the entire system working.

The news of my volunteer technical activity spread fast around our small community. Within a few days, a new resident who lived just two doors away from us asked if I could help use their Comcast cable TV’s remote control. When I saw them, the man proudly took me through their three-bedroom villa to show off their electronics.

I could hardly believe my eyes. Every bedroom had a TV, cable box, VCR, and a DVD player—sometimes made by different manufacturers. Each component had its separate remote control. In addition, the living room boasted a sound system and a universal remote control.

During the next week, with his wife’s help, I convinced him to use only one remote control in each room. We wrote clear instructions for each one and the functions he used most. She put the other controllers away in carefully labeled boxes. After that, he only called for help when he could not find the instructions.

SRC had strict policies for dog owners. Before moving in, Missy had to pass tests to prove her friendliness with people and other pets. We also had to sign an agreement to walk her only with a short leash and to clean up and properly dispose of her waste. Being such a highly trained dog, we never had any problem keeping our agreement, although Susan told me about an odd experience shortly after we moved in.

After returning to SRC from a morning walk with Missy on a leash, Susan noticed another resident approaching her on the sidewalk. When the woman saw Missy, she immediately moved to the other side of the street.

“Don’t worry,” said Susan to the other resident as they were getting closer. “Our dog is very friendly.”

“But I am not,” replied the woman angrily as she hurried away.

So, we learned that not everyone is a dog lover. Also, we soon found out that not all dog owners honored their agreement to “pick up poop.” After several reminders in our weekly publication, management threatened to follow the procedure used at LCG in Carlsbad. Having faced similar problems, LCG required all dogs to be DNA-tested. After that, when poop wasn’t picked up, the guilty pooch could quickly be identified, and the owner was fined \$300. Their new policy promptly solved the problem.

I called a meeting of all dog owners to discuss the issue. Hearing that the majority wanted to prevent DNA testing, I proposed the formation of a club that would help residents obey the rules specified by management. As the one who proposed the meeting, the group elected me president. In our following meetings, among other tasks, we identified fellow residents who had difficulty walking their dogs and searched for ways to help them follow the rules.

In the spring, the Activity Committee arranged with some stores in the nearby shopping mall to have a fashion show. They asked a dozen residents, including Susan and me, to model. Susan readily accepted that invitation, but I had trouble seeing myself parading in front of a large group while wearing borrowed clothing. After some arm-twisting, I agreed and, to my surprise, enjoyed the experience. So far, however, none of London's Burberry Street fashion show organizers have called us to participate in their events.

Near the end of our first year at SRC, their Resident Council president informed me that one of their members resigned and asked if I would consider taking his place. Although I knew the president well—we frequently worked out together in the gym—I wanted to hear how others felt about the council's operation first.

As I searched for advice from the residents, some did not sound encouraging.

"The owners make all the decisions," said one. "Why waste your time?"

"The council members constantly argue with each other. They don't accomplish much," said another.

Listening to such negative attitudes, I wondered whether it might be better not to be involved. Then, a third resident spoke up. "You have quite a bit of business experience," he said. "Perhaps you could help to settle some of the disputes."

After discussing the challenging task with Susan, I decided to go forward and apply for the post. Within a short time, the council members voted, and I became one of them. During my first year of service, I participated in a Task Force to handle issues between the residents and management. I became Treasurer and Chair of their Employee Gift Fund in the second year. These tasks required a fair amount of time, but I enjoyed participating.



L to R: SRC Fashion Show, Opera night, Halloween with neighbors while dressed as Jack Lalanne.

Health Care Concerns

The Los Altos area offered excellent medical facilities. The offices of all our dentists and all doctors were closed; some were located within walking distance. If needed, we could quickly drive to the Palo Alto Medical Foundation Clinic, El Camino, and Stanford Hospitals in less than 15 minutes. Naturally, finding new facilities for our coverage in Pleasanton was a significant

concern.

Discussing our worries with Doctor George helped put our minds at ease. The Dublin PAMF Clinic where he worked was only one freeway stop from SRC; we could be there door-to-door in ten minutes.

“I’ll recommend a good team of physicians for you,” he assured us. “Because all your health records are already in our computer, viewing them from the Dublin Clinic will be simple.”

He was right. The GP he introduced us to at his clinic was as skilled and caring as our former doctors.

Whenever we visited his clinic, we wore our name tags. “Is Dr. Besser your son?” the receptionists would always ask.

“Yes, he is,” we would proudly reply, and the royal treatment always followed. All our medical needs were handled exceptionally well during our two-year stay at SRC.

Life in Silicon Valley Compared to the East Bay Region

After living in Pleasanton for a while, we recalled how prejudiced many San Francisco Bay Peninsula residents were about life in the East Bay region. Some of our former neighbors did not hide their feelings when they heard where we were moving.

“The East Bay is culturally backward,” said one with a snobbish expression. “You’ll miss the theaters and opera companies we have around here.”

“They don’t have the wide variety of ethnic cuisines,” warned another.

“The climate is more extreme. You’ll hate the hot summers,” added a third at our moving-away party.

Others cited examples of friends who had moved to the East Bay and felt remorse later.

“Don’t sell your LOS Altos home because you won’t be able to afford to move back here later,” we heard repeatedly. They were confident that we would not last long in the East Bay.

Well, those statements had some truth. Compared to the Los Altos climate, the winter in Pleasanton was somewhat colder, and the summer was warmer. The price of our former home continued to appreciate rapidly, much faster than in the rest of California. It took a while to find truly high-grade restaurants. Only when Tesla opened a nearby dealership in Dublin did our Tesla meet too many of his cousins. Back on the Peninsula, we could only watch the performance of the Live from the Met movie broadcasts in a theater if we purchased theater tickets weeks earlier. Being cautious, we bought tickets early to the first opera broadcast we attended at the East Bay—only to see the movie theater about 25 percent full.

On the other hand, being close to the Lawrence Livermore Lab, we frequently met highly educated people, many of whom also lived at SRC. We purchased inexpensive Senior Clipper Cards and enjoyed taking BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) into San Francisco, Oakland, and SFO Airports when we traveled. Life, in general, was more relaxed than it was in Silicon Valley. We would not move back!

Back to Coaching

Following retirement, I immensely enjoyed twelve years of volunteer coaching with the Mountain View High School track team. After contacting some of the schools in and near Pleasanton, I agreed to work with the hurdlers of Granada High School in Livermore during the spring of 2015.

Due to a previous improper relationship between a teacher and a student at the school (as well as other issues), I had to go through all the health and background testing again. In addition, the district required me to take and pass nine lengthy online programs: Coaching Fundamentals; Concussion in Sports; Conflict Management—Managing the Angry Parent; Sexual Harassment; Child Abuse—Identification and Intervention; Boundary Invasion; Mandatory Reporting; Bullying and Response; and Sport Supervision and Safety. Never before have I worked so hard to become eligible for an unpaid volunteer job!

Track season started at the end of January and ended in early June. My commitment required me to be at the school's track Monday through Friday afternoons and to travel with the team to occasional track meets at other schools. Granada was only a ten-minute drive from SRC, which usually allowed me to be home in time for dinner. Although we did not have too many star hurdlers that year, an enthusiastic group appreciated my help. Eventually, we caught the attention of the local newspaper, *The Livermore Independent*, and they published an article under the heading "Teaching Others to Conquer Hurdles." At end-of-season ceremonies that year, I received an honorary team uniform.

Teaching Others to Conquer Hurdles

By Carol Graham May 21, 2015 Updated May 21, 2015



Les Besser coaches Granada hurdler Katy Johnson.

The headline picture in the *Livermore Independent* was taken while I was working with a beginning hurdler. I hope only a few of the readers realized that the young girl was supposed to reach out with her opposite arm while attacking the hurdle.

Honoring My Mother

In the first volume of my memoir, I described how my mother had saved the lives of several Jews in Budapest during the Fascist regime. Among those, Mimi Fürst was able to snatch her young daughter from the ghetto using my mother's christening documents. Mrs. Fürst had passed away, but her daughter, Judit, lived in Stockholm, and the two of us have maintained contact for some time.

"Laci, I want to nominate your mother for recognition by Yad Vashem¹," she told me during one of our Skype conversions.

Her offer touched me deeply. "That would be wonderful. What do I need to do?" I asked.

Judit downloaded and forwarded me the requirements. After I provided her with all the information, she completed the application and sent it to Israel. About six months later, Yad Vashem informed us by mail that my mother was accepted. The Israeli Consul General in San Francisco would present her award to me at a special ceremony on the 2015 Holocaust

¹ An official Israeli organization that recognizes non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust (see more on the back cover).

Remembrance Day. The local media would also be invited to the event.

Upon hearing the news, SRC's Executive Director generously arranged for a bus to take Susan, me, and thirty residents who wanted to witness the occasion. George, Nanci, and some other close friends also came along. At the ceremony, I gave a short talk about my mother. The entire memorial was beautiful, and I hoped Mom's soul was watching it from heaven.



The Yad Vashem certificate; Accepting the award from the Consul; Posing with Nanci and George

We attended the International Microwave Symposium (IMS) at the San Francisco Convention Center a month later. I was cited with the honor of **Microwave Legend** for my contribution to Computer-Aided Design (CAD) and continuing education.

Although the microwave industry has expanded significantly since my retirement, we still recognized many friends and former colleagues among the 14,000 participants. One of those, a Hungarian professor and longtime associate, received the Career Award, the highest recognition of the Microwave Engineers' Professional Society (IEEE). We also stopped by the booth of our former company, Besser Associates, to chat with their current management team.



International Microwave Symposium IMS2016
22-27 May 2016 San Francisco, California

Moving Again

Wanting to be closer to our grandchildren, Susan and I periodically contacted LCG about the status of the villa availability and received the same answer, “18 to 36 months.” Finally, during the spring of 2016, a villa became available. Susan was visiting Kent’s family in Carlsbad then, so she rushed to inspect it. Within a short time, she phoned me.

“Les, the whole interior of a three-bedroom villa is gutted, and they are ready to refurbish it,” she told me excitedly. “Fly down to see it.”

The next day, I joined her. We liked the unit on the community's south end and agreed to take it.

Selecting appliances, countertops, window and floor coverings, and paint colors took a few more days. Marketing informed us that the remodeling would only take about a month. We returned to Pleasanton with a feeling of accomplishment and began to plan our move south.

An Unexpected Pleasant Surprise

I met Nanci, who lived in Concord, about 30 miles from Pleasanton, and I told her about our planned move during lunch. She and George knew we’d eventually relocate to Carlsbad but didn’t know when.

“I am sorry to move farther from you, but it is only a one-hour flight,” I told her, seeing how surprised she was. Then, she sprang a big one on me.

“Aaron and I also have news for you. I am pregnant,” she said with a sparkle in her eye.

I gasped with disbelief. I thoroughly enjoyed the four wonderful grandchildren from Susan’s side of our family, but I had resigned myself to the fact that neither Nanci nor George would have children. It had been a deep regret of mine.

“That. is wonderful,” I stammered when I finally regained my composure. Then I jumped up and hugged her. After sitting down again, we called Susan to share the good news. We learned that the baby would be a girl a few months later.

Under the impression that biological parenthood was not possible, both Nanci and Aaron shared total surprise when a doctor’s visit confirmed Nanci’s suspicions that she was pregnant during the spring of 2016. Several months later, their ‘miracle’ baby girl, Holly, joined the family right before the fall holiday season. Nanci, Aaron, and the rest of our family welcomed the new addition with joyful hearts. Susan and I spent time with the parents, helping them adjust to their new lifestyle.



L to R: Holly, being two months and one year old. With her parents and cousin Madeline.

Holly is a sweet, intelligent little girl with a penchant for curiosity; I naturally assume she inherited my persistence and perseverance. We all enjoy watching her grow and develop into a person. I cross my fingers and hope she will share my love of opera, soccer, and Hungarian food!

Transition to Southern California

Although Susan and I had known that we'd move to LCG sometime, we didn't know when. Now we knew and had to act fast. Finding replacements for the various committee functions we held was a significant task. Fortunately, with the help of some old-fashioned "arm-twisting," other residents agreed to take over our responsibilities.

A quiet little song to mourn the Bessers' departure.

Sung to the tune of "Clementine"

Written by Maryanne and David Silber

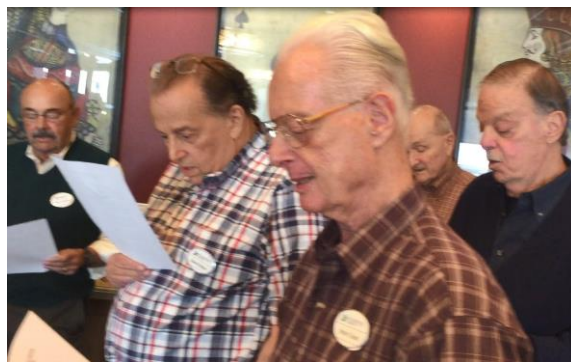
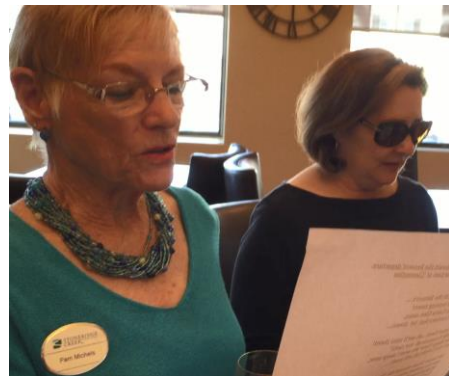
Oh the Bessers, Oh the Bessers....
Les and Sue are leaving town.
They are off to La Costa Glen soon,
Stoneridge Creekers feel let down...

We will miss them...oh, we'll miss them!
Who will Treasure all our cash?
As for Sleep Club? We won't sleep now,
And our CPAPs all will crash....

We know Susan missed the "Singers."
But she quilted with her group,
Walked dear Missy, in the morning....
She'll leave friends here in the soup...

Yes, we hope you'll both be happy.
Little kids will bring you smiles,
But please know we'll always miss you,
Though you're many miles away....

Oh, the Bessers, Oh the Bessers...
Les and Susan will leave town.
They are off to La Costa Glen soon,
Stoneridge Creekers feel down!



Photos taken at the sing-along farewell party.

The replacement Resident Council treasurer and his wife arranged a farewell party for us where some of our friends performed the following song; of course, we joined. The next day, the RC arranged another party. With tears in our eyes, Susan and I said goodbye to the many new friends we made during our two-year stay at SRC.

La Costa Glen — Our Final Destination

As Marketing predicted, our second relocation was relatively simple. The current villa and the new one were nearly identical. *Gentle Transitions*, a company dedicated to moving seniors, assigned three teams for the task: packers, movers, and unpackers. The first team came to SRC, took pictures of the furniture layout, and packed our belongings for the movers. The following day, the movers showed up with two large trucks and loaded everything into their vehicles by early afternoon.

Before driving to Carlsbad at the beginning of June 2016, we decided to simplify our lives and part with our Lexus SUV, becoming a “one-car family.” The Tesla’s hatchback and generous room behind the rear seats provided a comfortable space for Missy. After the movers left, we loaded our computers into the car and took off with Missy for the 450-mile trip.

Our Tesla could cover 260 miles with fully charged batteries, so we could have made the trip using a free Supercharge station only once. However, to avoid “range anxiety,” we stopped several times for short rests at the Tesla recharging stations.

At LCG, the third Gentle Transition team directed the movers to unpack and place the furniture and furnishings where they had been in our previous villa. When finished, they folded the empty boxes and left. Susan and I watched with amazement at the ease and efficiency of the operation.

The two years we spent at LCG’s sister community proved to be very helpful for us in adjusting to life at La Costa Glen. Although LCG opened in 2003, their customs and operations were very similar. Construction standards, however, seemed to have been higher up north, as we learned soon after moving in.

“Looks like we have heated tile floors in the kitchen and bathrooms,” Susan told me one morning when she walked barefooted in the villa. After checking it, I agreed, but it did not make sense. Asking around the neighborhood, I found that nobody had the same experience. A few days later, I learned the real reason: the hot water pipes, buried in the concrete slab foundation under the building, had developed leaks.

Our Plant Operation department followed up on our complaint and soon gave us the bad news. The underground hot water pipes must be terminated and rerouted through the attic. Then, the pipes would be brought down to each water faucet by cutting holes in the walls. The messy repair would take an entire week!

The news hit us hard, particularly Susan because we assumed the clutter associated with the move was already behind us. Our Persian rugs had been cleaned, pictures hung on the walls, and the entire home was sparkling clean. But there was no other option, so we faced the construction. To ease our pain, management generously compensated us for our inconvenience.

Because Susan and I jumped on board at SRC quickly and became involved with too many activities, we promised each other to go slower at LCG. We agreed to refrain from doing

committee work during the first year. Instead, we'd become more heavily involved with our family, spending more time with them—particularly with the grandchildren. After that self-imposed limit passed, we gradually began participating in more activities. Susan became a villa rep and a Food and Beverage Committee member. Not to be left behind, I applied and was elected to be a member of the Resident Council.

Unlike the Council meetings held in a large auditorium at Stoneridge Creek with 20-30 residents, the LCG Council meets in the Board Room, and residents rarely attend. Other than that difference, the topics reviewed and actions taken are similar. During the first two years of my three-year term, in addition to assisting with special projects, I was the liaison to our Safety and Plant Operation Committees. As the Council's Treasurer in the third year, I was responsible for our annual Employee Appreciation Fund. Planning the campaign, creating a promotional booklet (see on the right), soliciting contributions from the residents, and distributing the receipts was time-consuming, but watching the faces of our employees and hearing their gratitude at the award ceremony made it a worthwhile experience.



In addition to my Council activities, I also studied to become a certified AARP Safe Driver Course instructor and a Coordinator of AARP's CARFIT program. Although in 2020, the Coronavirus restriction interfered with the classes, over 250 residents participated during the first three years, learning to be more aware of the various factors that affect our driving (aging, medical conditions, medications, new safety features, road, and traffic conditions, etc.)

After our third grandchild was born in 2005, we assumed that no more would be coming. I received a nice sweat jacket for my 75th birthday in 2011 with the lettering "The World's Greatest Nagypapa," listing Matthew, Madeline, and Grace around it. I treasured the jacket and only wore it for special occasions. After Finn was born in 2014, Susan added his name, and the same happened after Holly came along in 2016. Will there be any more surprises???



Left: Front view of our new villa at LCG, looking just like the one we had at Stoneridge Creek. By coincidence, the house number is 1987, when Susan and I met. It must be a good omen. Center: Senior double tennis players, average age is 84! Right: Holly's first birthday.

Becoming a “Writer”

Justified or not, engineers are often labeled as being “poor communicators.” Although Susan needs to remind me frequently to “talk more,” I’ve always enjoyed writing. Speaking Hungarian only during the first twenty years of my life, writing in English is not as easy as I would like. Holding a part-time job in the 1980s with a technical magazine and co-authoring two textbooks twenty years later encouraged me also to write my memoirs later. In 2018, an unexpected opportunity popped up at La Costa Glen.

While having dinner with another resident couple, our conversation turned to dogs. I told them the embarrassing time when our Labradoodle, Missy, passed an obedience course, but I—her handler—failed (see pp 237-238). “This is a great story,” said the husband, a writer in our monthly magazine. “Write it up and submit it to the *Glen Tidings!*”

During the next few days, I extracted the story from my memoir and emailed him the file. He called soon after and told me that the Editor was interested in publishing it, but I needed to reduce its word length from 1,150 to 300 words.

“It cannot be done,” I protested. “It will not make sense if I reduce it to nearly a fourth of its length. “Oh yes,” he replied. “I’ll guide you.” I did not believe him, but he proved me wrong. It was possible (see the final copy below).

After receiving positive feedback from residents, I asked the Glen Tidings Editor if I could become one of their writers. She agreed. I began to attend their meetings and regularly submitted articles on various topics. In addition, I have also been taking pictures of various activities for the magazine and enjoy my participation.

Another Tesla S

When the lease of our second Tesla expired, we contemplated whether to keep the car or replace it with a newer model. Tesla has been cleverly adding new features that cannot be added to older models, so we opted for a 2019 model. Our garage has electric charging connections, so we don’t know the nearest gas station.

As you can guess, we love the Tesla, although it would be nice to have a version with less road noise. Perhaps Lexus will build one in the future.

Flunking a Course

Contributed by Les Besser

While living in Silicon Valley, Susan and I heard that some patients in assisted living and skilled nursing facilities seldom had visitors. Knowing that dog-lovers enjoy touching furry friends, we signed up our Labradoodle, Missy, for a demanding, eight-week patient visitation course by Delta Society.

During the first session, the officials handed out a thick manual and explained that all graduate dogs and handlers are covered by a million-dollar liability insurance policy during visits. Therefore, only those who pass Delta’s rigorous requirements graduate. Susan and I agreed to take everything seriously and faithfully attended all the sessions with Missy.

The final exam was held in a large noisy hall filled with volunteer patients in hospital beds or wheelchairs or on walkers, with distractions like delicious food spills on the floor. I decided to go first with Missy, and Susan was to follow.

An examiner gave me a map that showed a looping path to

follow. Holding a clipboard, he shadowed us and made notes as we passed by the various stations. The hardest requirement came at midpoint: ask the dog to sit and wait while I walked out of the room for 30 seconds. No problem—Missy sat there patiently and waited for my return.

“Missy is wonderful,” the examiner said at completion, adding, “Unfortunately you failed!”

I was stunned and asked, “Why? I thought I did everything right.”

“You didn’t introduce yourself and Missy to the patients you encountered,” he replied. “You didn’t engage them in conversation either.”

“Those weren’t stated on the map you gave me,” I protested.

“They’re in the manual! Haven’t you read it?” I had not. So he flunked me.

Overhearing the conversation, Susan passed easily. A month later, I retook the exam and succeeded.

The joy our visits created was priceless!



Travel, Travel, Travel

Repeating previous Club Med excursions, in early 2013, we flew to Cancun to join Daphne, Jim, Matthew, and Grace for a week. Swimming in warm turquoise water, lounging on white sandy beaches, playing various sports and games, and feasting at the delicious buffets kept us busy. Four years later, Susan and I returned to Club Med, but this time to their Ixtapa location, where our friends, the Lahrs, joined us. We agreed to make it an annual visit, perhaps bringing some of our grandchildren with us next time.

Keeping with the tropical theme, we also spent time on the various Hawaiian Islands, meeting again with friends to share lazy days in the surf and sand. Susan and lady friends always signed up for Black Tiger Yoga to stretch and joined in the water aerobics while I struggled with weights in a local gym. Somehow, the ladies' workouts always look more fun!

We flew to Washington, D.C., on September 2013, the same day as the famous Naval Yard shooting. Once again, flags were lowered as a sad reminder. We stayed in Silver Springs, Maryland, using the Metro to enter the "District." The highlight was a visit with Susan's cousin, Dorothy. Her son and family were visiting from Australia, so we also had a chance to meet them. They took us to Annapolis to tour the Naval Academy on the Severn River in the Chesapeake Bay. We enjoyed watching the parade of the trim, well-dressed cadets.

In June, I flew to Eugene, Oregon, to watch the US National Track & Field Championship with my former college classmates, the Lahrs. The meet occurred in record-high temperatures and provided opportunities to watch some of the world's top athletes closely. Even more thrilling, my long-term dream came true after talking with one of the American national women's team members—she allowed me to hold her Olympic gold medal in my hand!

Some people enjoy vacation travel to a single resort, packing and unpacking only once. Others prefer hopping through different cities or countries during their trip, being exposed to various scenery and cultures. Susan and I have found that an excellent way to combine the benefits of both choices is by taking cruises—either on rivers or the open seas. The former has the advantage of docking the small ships at the hearts of major cities, allowing convenient visits by simply walking off the vessels. For ocean cruising, we prefer medium-size ships, carrying only 600 to 700 passengers, large enough to offer more amenities like swimming pools, gyms, and a choice of restaurants, without the large crowds of the mega-ships. Our favorite cruise lines are Viking, Oceania, and Regent Seven Seas.

In 2014, a fantastic South Pacific Cruise started in Auckland, New Zealand, and ended in Moorea, French Polynesia. The South Sea islands are indeed paradise in the Pacific. Halfway through the cruise, the captain announced a major typhoon heading in our direction and asked if there would be any objection to changing our planned route. As expected, all passengers quickly agreed to alter course to avoid the storm. We gladly gave up one of the Bali ports to prevent a shaky experience. Sunriver, Oregon, was colorful in October 2014 and VERY cold. The power was out when we arrived, so we drove back into town for pizza, candles, and matches! By the time we returned, the power was back on. But from now on, we carry matches.

In July 2015, we sailed from Copenhagen to the coast of Norway, where, at our first stop, we realized that their summer is much colder than ours. Being thrifty shoppers, we quickly bought heavier clothing at the local Salvation Army Thrift store. Passing into the Arctic Circle and stopping at Longyearbyen, where the World Seed Bank is located, we continued toward

Russia's Murmansk, where we toured the first Russian nuclear submarine and spied the Russian military fleet as we entered the harbor. Next, at Solovetsky Island, our tour guides took us through a former monastery that became one of the most severe prisons of the Soviet regime, where political prisoners had lived under inhumane conditions. Scary place!



Pretending to be an Olympian, Different October years, one in Hawaii and another in Oregon.

On our return down the coast to Norway, we took an RIB (Rapid Inflatable Boat, capable of moving at 50MPH) to a crab safari. After a harrowing ride with the young hot-rod Norwegian crew, they pulled up the crab pots and allowed us to pose with their catch. Later, we dined on fresh crab and steamed over an open fire in the icy Norwegian air— a memorable, delicious meal. Breathtaking fjords lay ahead as we continued down the coast, eventually returning to Copenhagen.



Warming on a heated bench in Bergen, Holding one of the captured king crabs; Sunset at 11 pm.

In April 2016, we flew to Miami and boarded a Regent SS cruise ship. With Erica and George joining us, we sailed through the Panama Canal and to San Francisco. During one of the open-sea cruising days, I gave my sleep presentation to the passengers in the main theater. The cruise was fabulous, even though our scheduled stop at Acapulco was canceled due to safety considerations on shore. After coming home to LCG, we learned that our new neighbors, MaryJane and Jim Wiesler, had been on the same cruise at the same time, two floors directly below us. Small world!

In July 2016, we traveled to Mt. Rushmore and the Badlands with our three older grandchildren, Matthew, Madeline, and Grace. We spent a week of exploration with the Road Scholar Intergenerational (programs specially designed for grandparents and grandchildren).

Lots of spectacular scenery, history, horseback riding, panning for gold, and s'mores around the campfire provided busy, fun-filled days. (In 2017, we took them on another Road Scholar tour in San Francisco to visit Muir Woods, the Golden Gate Bridge, and explore Chinatown, the Natural History Museum, and Fisherman's Wharf—all on public transportation!)

In September 2016, we flew on the huge Airbus A380 to Budapest and spent ten days at the fabulous Marriott Hotel on the shore of the Danube--enjoying great weather and good Hungarian food. We were especially delighted in the companionship of friends and relatives, including Les' sister Kati and grand-niece Emese, who had been married that year. We did not lose any weight!



Budapest at night from the Marriott; Eating “Lángos” at a market; Celebrating Susan’s 75th BD

One of our most memorable trips took place in the spring of 2017. After flying to Singapore, where we stayed for a couple of days, we boarded the Oceania Insignia for a 17-day cruise to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), docking at Myanmar, Thailand, and India on the way. While visiting one of the largest Muslim mosques in the world in Abu Dhabi, the “Moral Police” challenged Susan’s full dress because her wrists were still visible.



Impressive view of the former Soviet gulag; Burj Khalifa, 2,722 feet; Susan’s “promiscuous” outfit.

In Dubai, we rode a high-speed elevator nearly to the top (148th of 163 floors) of the highest building in the world, Burj Khalifa, as shown with the arrow in the photo). By the way, UAE knows how to spend our oil money; most of their skyscrapers have unique architectural designs, their roads are clean and smooth, trains are modern and quiet, and most automobiles are new. We’d

never seen so many luxury cars in any city before Bentleys, Maseratis, and Rolls Royce swarmed all over!

On New Year's Eve 2017, my niece was married in an old airplane hangar in Durham, NC. Being sissy Californians, Susan and I shivered in the large building until the heat came on, but it was worth seeing the happy couple saying their vows. My sister Eva was bedridden in a skilled nursing facility nearby and unable to join the ceremony, but we visited her later.

Our annual "pilgrimage" at Club Med, Ixtapa, in February 2018, 2019, and 2020 were also joyful. We learned that the company was sold to Chinese investors and hoped the new owners would maintain a high-quality environment and service.



Niece Debra's wedding Sundown at Ixtapa Gym workout is a must With George Washington

Our last major cruise before the coronavirus shutdown was on the Viking Seas in mid-2018, starting at Bergen, Norway, with stops at the Shetland Islands, Greenland, Iceland, and several Canadian ports, and ending at Montreal. Before departure, we spent a week in Budapest, enjoying native Hungarian food, shopping, and visiting friends and the few remaining family members.

A strongman has headed the Hungarian government for nearly a decade, and it was interesting to hear that some people, mostly the younger generation, liked him. In contrast, others would prefer a different kind of government. Those in the first group enjoyed traveling and being involved with business opportunities. Older residents miss the safety and the government subsidies provided by the former Socialist System. Interestingly, considering the 150-year Turkish occupation in the 16th Century, most people are openly opposed to Middle Eastern Moslem immigrants.

We have taken Viking river cruises in various parts of the world, but this was our first ocean cruise experience. Decorated in modern Scandinavian style, the 650-passenger vessel was new, luxurious, spacious, and comfortable. They served delicious food and offered good evening entertainment in their large theater, outfitted with state-of-the-art AV equipment. Their Activity Director knew me from a previous Oceania cruise and allowed me to give my Sleep Disturbance presentation to nearly 200 passengers. Highlights included breathtaking scenery and the Northern Lights.

Flying to Kauai in March 2021 was a new experience. Concerned about public health, all the Hawaiian Islands required proof of Coronavirus vaccinations and a three-day quarantine before allowing free movement around the island. Nevertheless, after a year of restrictions, we enjoyed the mild climate, the ocean, and the lush green landscape.



Left: Breathtaking view of the Northern Light in Greenland.

Right: On the way to Kauai, I learned that I've flown more mileage on United than our Captain.

Life in my eighties

In my youth, I considered people over sixty to be old. I don't recall anyone in our four-story Budapest apartment building who had lived to their eighties, and I could not imagine myself being that old. I am an octogenarian now, living in a retirement community with an average age of 84.7 years; I don't feel so bad. My 90-year-old tennis partner calls me a kid. Medicare provides me with complete health insurance coverage at a reasonable price. I don't have to remove my shoes at the airport TSA checkpoints, and in Europe, young people offer me their seats on public transportation. Yes, I do have pains and aches after extensive physical exercise. Still, Susan and I live in a luxurious, excellent environment within a short drive of one of our children and two grandchildren. We regularly visit our other two children and their families in the San Francisco Bay Area. Kent and his family recently relocated to Kalispell, Montana, so we must also start traveling to that state. Alaska Air recently introduced a nonstop flight between San Diego and Kalispell that will simplify our trips.

After owning three Tesla S models in nine years, we switched to a Genesis GV60 electric SUV for two reasons: although a great car, the Tesla was low-profile – not easy to get in and out. We found that other seniors did not like to ride with us. In addition, Tesla refused to add Reversed Cross Traffic Warning (RCTW) to their cars. Owning the Genesis solved both.

Just before Thanksgiving day of 2023, an IEEE Microwave Section representative called with excellent news: they selected me for the 2024 Career Award. The citation reads:

“For a Career of Leadership, Meritorious Achievement, Creativity and Outstanding Contributions in the Field of Microwave Theory and Technology.”

After working in that field for nearly 60 years, I felt honored to receive the highest recognition from the Electrical Engineering Society. Susan and I will fly to Washington, DC, in June 2024 to attend the International Microwave Symposium and pick up the award. Hopefully, I will have opportunities to meet many of my former professional colleagues, customers, and students!

After learning that my half-sister, Kati, was placed in hospice in Budapest, I flew over for a short visit in June 2024. She represented my generation's last living family member, and I was thankful to spend a few days with her. She passed away shortly after.

At this point, Susan and I look forward to seeing our family's progress in life. May God give them happiness, good health, and prosperity. Amen.



Our Southern California family members: Finn, Kent, Madeline, Joan, Susan and I, Grace, Matthew, and Daphne; Love of Hungarian food; Spiderman and Wonder Woman at the La Costa Glen Halloween party.



Nanci, Aaron, and Holly; Daphne and Erica with George; Grace, the Irish Dance champion.

Epilogue: Special Tributes to People Who Have Played Major Roles in My Life

Life has placed many “hurdles” in my path! Thankfully, my guardian angel has provided people to guide me through those obstacles. Most helpers are no longer alive, but I want to recognize them for their actions.

- **My Mother.** Finding suitable work with only a third-grade formal education and raising an illegitimate child alone had been extremely difficult for a single woman. When the Fascists took her employer, Mr. Braun, away, she had to find a new place for the two of us to live. She found ways to feed, clothe, and care for me by working as a laundress, a house cleaner, and doing any other available work. Her working day began early morning and stretched late into the night. Unselfishly devoting her life to my welfare, she was always there when I needed her. When my cousin Éva was orphaned, my mother adopted her and shared our meager resources with the young girl.
- **Mrs. Dancsa.** Right after my birth, my single mother could not find any domestic live-in work where I could be with her. This young mother, with two young sons of her own, agreed to provide

a loving home for the first years of my life. During my stay, I cemented a lifelong relationship with my “milk-brother” Pista and his grandmother, whom I also considered my own *Nagymama*.

- **Mr. Braun.** When my mother realized I was closer to the Dancsa family than her, she searched desperately for ways for us to live together under the same roof. After numerous failures to find suitable employment, she considered ending both our lives. At the last minute, a kind man, Mr. Braun, saved us by hiring her as a housekeeper and accepting me in his home. He became my mentor and helped me to develop mathematical skills at an early age.
- **Elementary School Teachers.** Three teachers provided exceptional care and guidance during my early days of schooling. My Class Chief and Hungarian language teacher, Mr. Hered, encouraged me to read and saw that I always received free school lunches. Mr. Bordás, the math and science teacher, elevated my self-esteem by declaring me a “math genius.” Our PE teacher and former Olympian sprinter, Mr. Vadas, directed me to track and field.
- **Coaches.** At the track club, three of the coaches, Messrs. Agócs, Sugár, and Kovács-Kléri, helped me to develop running skills and learn how to both win and lose graciously. They ingrained in me the importance of proper running form by following the fundamental laws of physics. The lessons they taught me became invaluable in my coaching practice.
- **Pista.** My “milk brother,” or, as I usually referred to him, Cousin Pista, was my early-life role model. I immediately followed his example when he began to build radios, joined a sports club, and chose technical high school instead of the conventional gymnasium. I thank him for the involvement in electronics that influenced my entire adult life.
- **Mrs. Leflinger.** After the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, I feared the Communist retribution for my minor involvement and considered escaping to the West. The path, however, was narrow and dangerous. I don’t know if I would have tried to leave if it hadn’t been for the assistance of my sister’s colleague. A small group of her friends and I safely reached Austria in a stolen Army truck and received refugee status.
- **Canada.** When the restrictive US quota system did not allow me to immigrate to this country, Canada accepted me with open arms. Although I chose to stay in the US after college graduation, I will always be grateful to Canada for allowing me to live and work there.
- **Mr. Leahy.** Finding work in my new country was not easy without sufficient language skills. I am thankful to the Irish Canadian man who had faith in me. He hired me to work in his radio-TV repair shop, though I had no Canadian experience, at the same wage he paid his other technicians.
- **Professor Wicks.** After learning that I was not eligible for a track scholarship at the University of Colorado, I found myself without enough money to pay for the out-of-state tuition. Professor Wicks, the head of the electronics laboratories, gave me a job as a half-time lab assistant, which reclassified me as a state resident. The lower tuition allowed me to stay in school. He was also my mentor throughout my three years at CU.
- **The Hewlett-Packard Company.** After working at HP’s Microwave Division for only eight months, I learned I had been infected with TB while visiting Hungary. Management was extremely helpful and subsidized my expenses during my three months of mandatory hospitalization. They also placed my project on hold until I could return to work. No wonder I loved the way HP treated their employees.

- My Family.** When I was facing divorce, my two young children rallied to keep up my morale. The kids asked for a 50-50 shared custody arrangement that helped me stay in close contact with them. Being a single father for eight years taught me to appreciate the role of parenthood. In the absence of belonging to a church or social group, my in-laws and close friends provided me with much-needed emotional support. The lessons I learned at Lifespring also contributed to my acceptance of what could not be changed. Last but not least, my former in-laws have maintained a close relationship with me throughout the years. I appreciate their friendship.
- My wife.** After a lengthy search as a single parent, I met Susan, who became my life partner. During the past 32 years, our relationship has taught me to appreciate true love. She has enjoyed many good things with me and stands with me when I need help. Her two children quickly integrated with mine, enabling me to enjoy being a grandfather. I am incredibly grateful for having this wonderful woman in my life.



Left and top right: Two photos showing our five grandchildren, their parents, and the two family dogs. However, Missy is now in heaven.



Bottom right: The two youngest grandchildren, Holly (6) and Finn (8).



L to R: Sharing dinner with Kati two years before her death. Godson Laszlo's family. Niece Debby and husband at one of their daughter's high school graduation.

Four of my Famous Runner Mentors

Although I initially hoped to be a soccer player, I had the good fortune of being advised by four mentors with international track and field fame: Our neighbor, József Galambos, my two PE teachers (József Vadas in grade school and Sándor Rozsnyói in high school), and club sprinter/hurdler coach József Kovács were all Olympian runners:

József Galambos's running talent was discovered during his military service. In his mid-twenties, he started competing in 800 and 3000 meters but did not succeed in these distances. He became an excellent marathon runner in the colors of Kisvárdai SE (1924-30) and later became a member of the Egyetértés SC (1930-35) and then the BSZKRT SE (1935-37). He competed in the marathon at the Amsterdam Olympics in 1928, although he finished towards the back of the field. He reached the 4th position at the European Championships in Turin (1934) and won four times at the famous Košice International Marathon. He won the Hungarian Championship title 7 times in the marathon and twice in the 15 km run. During his career, he improved the national record four times.

József Vadas started athletics in his hometown in the colors of Székesfehérvár TC. In 1935, he moved to Budapest and joined OKHT SE. From 1937, he competed for Magyar Athletic Club; in 1945, he was with KAOE. Vadas won the Hungarian championship at 400 meters in 1936 and 1939, in the 4 x 400m relay in 1946, and in the 4x800 meter relay in 1939 and 1943. Between 1934 and 1940, he represented Hungary 14 times internationally. At the 1936 Berlin Olympics, Vadas reached the semifinals of 400 meters, the quarterfinals at 800 meters, and finished sixth in the 4x400 relay, as Hungary set a national record in the final, which stood for 16 years. In the 4x400 relay, he also finished sixth at the 1938 European Championships. After completing his sports career, Vadas worked as a coach and physical education teacher.

Sándor Rozsnyói was a steeplechase specialist who, in August 1954, set the first IAAF-recognized world record in the 3,000-meter steeple, recording 8:49.6 at Bern, Switzerland, while winning the 1954 European Championships. He also set four Hungarian records in the event and won Hungarian titles in 1954-55. Rozsnyói set another world record with 8:35.6 in Budapest in September 1956 and went to Melbourne as the favorite in his event but was edged out for the gold medal by Britain's Chris Brasher. After the 1956 Olympics Rozsnyói elected not to return to Hungary and settled initially in Austria, running briefly for them and then was national team coach in 1960. He studied geography at the University of Wien (Vienna) and emigrated to Australia in 1964, where he worked as a physical education teacher and tennis coach at the Epping Boys High School, Cumberland High School, and Model Farms High School, and as a coach with the Ryde-Hornsby Athletic Club until his retirement.

József Kovács started his sports career as a high jumper with KAOE, but in 1927, he moved to Budapest Budai Torna Egylet (BBTE) and switched to the sprints and hurdles. He won 29 Hungarian championships and set 20 Hungarian records in multiple events. He was the first Hungarian to run 400 meter under 48 seconds and the first under 15 seconds in the 110 meter hurdles. His national record at 200 meter was only broken 31 years later.



József Galambos leading a Marathon race



József Vadas



József Kovács



Sándor Rozsnyoi at the Melbourn Olympics