

## Bartlett's News Briefs



# NOT JUST ANYBODY

community-sponsored stories

by Pacifican Jean Bartlett, longtime Bay Area News Group writer

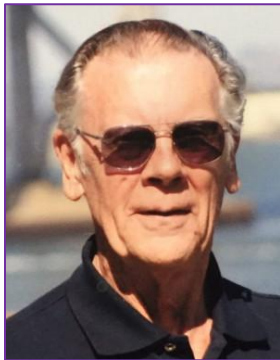
**For 12 weeks in the New Year, five Pacificans, who all happen to be veterans (*with guest answerers as needed*), answer a Question on the Street**

Background: when I wrote features for the printed *Pacifica Tribune*, for many years that also included a question on the street – *Bartlett's Bullets*. It's interesting to hear what our neighbors think. I've asked five well-known community volunteers, all veterans and members of the Pacifica American Legion, to answer a question each week for 12 weeks. The purpose is not to stir up annoyed responses from people who are not part of this group, but to just have a listen to what someone else is willing to share. It is also to encourage community dialogue.

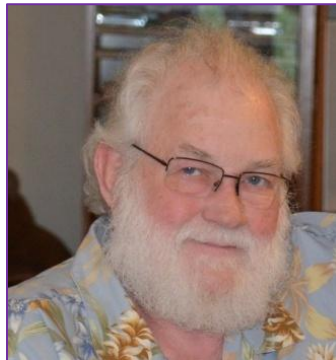
**Date: February 24, 2026**

**Question 8: What advice would you give your younger self?**

**Answerers:**



Robert Biby



Ed Clements



Jay Crawford



Allan Hale



Greg Stepanenko

**Robert Biby.** (Served: United States Marine Corps)

If I could travel back to my past, I would tell myself to recognize that I was clinically depressed and to find someone who could tell me how to handle that on a daily basis. I did not know I was clinically depressed or what that even meant. I was 45 when I learned about it, unexpectedly, from a conversation going on in my car. I thought; that's me. I went to see my regular doctor the next day and he told me, I fit the parameters. Subsequently, I began with first generation psych medicine which had a lot of bad side effects, but eventually my doctor found something for me which allowed me to say to my doctor, "Now I know how the rest of you guys live."

I would also tell myself in my 20s, to buy at least 100 shares of IBM. In addition, I would tell myself to buy 1,000 shares of Amazon as soon as they went public in the late 1990s. That would be worth over 200,000 plus shares now and millions and millions of dollars. I am almost tempted to say, I would tell my younger self, don't get out of the Marine Corps, stay in. When I was in the Marines, an Army sergeant told me that he personally could get me into Fort Rucker in Alabama to train as a helicopter pilot. There would be no problems. When I served in the Marines, you could not train as a helicopter pilot if you wore glasses. Back then, that was true for the Army as well, though apparently there was some wiggle room. If I did it, I would have had to switch into the Army from the Marines, but if I wanted to go back to the Marines that might not be such an easy switch. If I hadn't had glasses, my first choice back then would have been to be a Navy or Marine Corps pilot. Without glasses, I would have done whatever was needed to enter Naval Aviation School Command in Pensacola, Florida, as a Marine. Once I got into that cockpit, they would have had to yank me out by my snowy white beard! I was just young enough and ornery enough to want that – because I had been given the opportunity to go to the U.S. Army Airborne School at Fort Benning, Georgia, as a Marine corporal, which I did, and I loved it. Last time I jumped out of a plane, outside of the military, was when I was 70 and I am ready to do it again! From the future, I would tell my younger self to say "yes" to that sergeants' offer to train as a helicopter pilot. But I didn't make that choice because of the way I thought about things at that time, due to my undiagnosed clinical depression. If I had had early help, my life would have been completely different. That doesn't necessarily mean better.

**Ed Clements.** (Served: United States Navy)

I think the most important advice I would give my younger self is not to take everything so seriously and instead, look at it and try it before you judge it. When I was younger, if I saw something, I would immediately go "yea" or "nay." Now, I look at it and I go, "Maybe that's not wrong." I would advise myself to be more willing to bend, instead of being so rigid about whether I was going to do it or not do it. Also, I was one of these guys that if I was out with a group of friends doing stuff and they said, "I think we're going to do that," followed by, "I dare you to do that" – I'd go and do it. Later on, I regretted that I went and did it! I was pretty immature to start with and I grew up in the Navy. To me, school wasn't that important. My mother used to always say, she couldn't understand how the only plaque I used to get at the end of the school year was for perfect attendance. She'd say, "You go and you're there every day, why aren't your grades better?" Well, I went to socialize! When I got into high school, I remember one day some of the guys said, "Let's cut class." And I said, "Why? Everybody's here. If we cut class we're going to get into trouble." So, I might give myself some advice there. I would tell my younger self to tell my mom and my dad more often, how much I appreciated the way they guided me, and how much they did for all of us as a family. I didn't tell them enough. Something I never thought I'd do, but I did do and I'm okay with it, is something my dad used to do. He would tell me to do something, and I'd say, "Why?" And he'd say, "Because I said to, that's why. The reason why I asked you to do it, I'm not going to tell you. You'll figure it out." One day my eldest son and I were on the phone, and his son, who was maybe 12 at the time, was in the background. Chris turns away from the phone and says, "Because I said to." Chris turned back to me on the phone and said, "I swore I would never say that, Dad. But now that I've said it, I realize why you said it." I don't have any advice there, just appreciation that I passed that down from my

father, and my son has passed that down to his son. But really, as far as a lot of advice goes, that old phrase rings true, "You can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink!"

**Jay Crawford.** (Served: United States Army)

The most important decision you are going to make is who to start your family with. The decision that I historically made, my wife Denise, was the right decision. So I would tell my younger self, have faith in that decision. The foundation to a happy life is family. So, when you are balancing your priorities, family comes first. My next advice to myself is there are bad people in the world. They all make themselves known. You need to spend your energy looking for the good that is in people; it's there, you just have to look for it. When somebody does something good for you, especially in your profession, write it down in your notebook. It's really easy to remember when someone does you dirty. With the guys, that's mostly all they talk about. If you join in, you get a negative attitude. If you keep that notebook, when you start finding yourself feeling cynical, open it up and it will remind you – more than religion, more than anything else – that people out there are doing what they think is right. Even if you don't agree with their actions, if you start your negotiations with that in mind, you'll get a lot further, faster. Finally, I would tell myself, don't drink. Don't do anything that changes your ability to think straight, even if it is just for a party, or just for a minute. It sets you up to make some very embarrassing mistakes. Oh, and one last thing. Don't ever make a decision in anger. It will be the wrong decision every time. I would also remind myself, in the more present time, like today's storm, don't wear a cowboy hat on a windy day. It's a recipe for expensive aerobic exercise!

**Allan Hale.** (Served: United States Coast Guard)

As a youth I remember the great times I had with my father, racing hydroplane boats on Lake Merced and driving a midget race car at a course near the Cow Palace. Now as I grow very old, I would advise myself to really say thank you to my father for the great times.

At a critical time in my life I joined the United States Coast Guard and was at sea for two years and under some critical situations. I rose through the ranks five times with the help of the captain. As I look back I wonder, did I take the time to thank the captain? My advice to my younger self is to take the time. My advice to my younger self would also be to enjoy the present time.

Many years ago I met Ed Joyner here in Pacifica, a hero of the Second World War. He never talked about it but he had received many combat citations. We both enjoyed the same birthday, though he was 20 years older, and we became great friends. From Ed I learned all about the American Legion and the VFW, though I didn't know that Ed was quite a fox! He set me up to do all the jobs he did with the Legion and the VFW! But my advice to myself would be to always, enjoy your friends.

The greatest part of my life and the reason for living to this age is my family. We all share our love for each other. My advice to really anyone who is reading this is, accept the greatness of each other and share your abilities with others.

**Greg Stepanenko.** (Served: United States Navy)

Number one, I would say apply yourself and study harder. Save money so that you have something to retire on, more than what I have now. What I really did right was marrying my wife, having our family and doing military service. If it hadn't been for my military service, I would never have met my wife and I wouldn't have the family I have now. I wouldn't change any of it. But I would advise my younger self to buy stock in IBM and Xerox and Apple, all before they became what they are now. We would have been better off financially and we would have been in a better place to pay more for our children's education, and we would be in a better place now to help our grandchildren buy houses. It's what you want to do and

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better financial planning early on would have made that happen. I would advise my younger self to better appreciate my parents and realize what they went through. I thought everything was great when I was growing up. Sure there was stuff I wanted and didn't get, but I had everything I needed. My sister and I had no wants. What I didn't do was tell my dad how much I appreciated what he did for me. He was an introvert, but he went ahead, along with another gentleman, and started a Boy Scout troop. He was all in because of me, and doing that pulled him out of his shell. I would advise my younger self to tell him how much I appreciated that and him, and I would tell my mom how much I appreciated her as well.

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**By Jean Bartlett** (February 24, 2026)

*Writer Jean Bartlett was recognized by the Board of Supervisors, County of San Mateo, for "her writing that connects community and preserves local history." She can be contacted through her website, [www.bartlettbiographies.com](http://www.bartlettbiographies.com). This article was anonymously sponsored.*