

**Camaraderie and community inspired this veteran to join the American Legion**

**An interview-biography with Pacifica Vern Alonzo**

By Jean Bartlett ([www.bartlettbiographies.com](http://www.bartlettbiographies.com))

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**Written by Jean Bartlett**

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What are some of the things Pacifica American Legion (Post 238) and Pacifica VFW (Post 10245) do for their community? Since 2003, Post 238 has hosted the Pacifica Resource Center's monthly Family Harvest Program at the Legion Hall. This program provides community members in need with fresh vegetables and fruits, as well as staples such as milk, eggs, chicken, beans and rice. Along with donating their Hall for the event, Post 238 volunteers distribute, bag and carry groceries for their fellow Pacificans.

←In this 2014 photo, Vern Alonzo, then Junior Past Commander, joined fellow officers and members to celebrate Post 238's 50th anniversary. (Jean Bartlett photo.)

"We also do the hotdog cookout annually for the participants of Pacifica's Relay for Life," said Vern Alonzo, many-time Legion and VFW officer. "We do 'buddy checks,' for local veterans. We want to know if they are doing okay. We really did a lot of that during the COVID pandemic. With the Legion we do youth mentoring programs: Boys State, Girls State, the Oratorical Contest and the Americanism Essay Contest. We serve as Color Guard for Pacifica City Council meetings, whenever they request we do so. We serve as Color Guard, also as requested, at the burial services of service members. We visit veterans in the hospital and we do care package programs with our Legion's Auxiliary. We've helped veterans move. We want to help out. We are here to help out.

"I joined Pacifica's American Legion Post 238, 37 years ago. I joined the VFW a little later, in this century! I joined the Legion for the camaraderie, and I found that and so much more. I like the community involvement, the helping out your neighbor aspect. One of my fellow Legion members, Greg Stepanenko, and I have tried to recruit more members. We need new members. We're getting to be a bunch of old guys! The standard answer we get for why someone can't join is, 'I don't have time.' I think that people need to reassess that answer. Somehow or another, you make time. If I only did the things I had time for, I'd never get anything done."

Vernon Lewis Alonzo "Vern" was born on August 15, 1932, at San Joaquin General Hospital in French Camp, California. Located between Tracy and Stockton, French Camp is an unincorporated community with a population of 3,770 as of the 2020 census. From approximately 1832 to 1845, French Camp was the end of the line of the Oregon-California Trail used by French Canadian trappers.

"My grandmother, my mother's mother, was the head of our household. I'm not exactly sure where we were living in San Joaquin County when I was born, but my family worked as farm workers at that time, so somewhere near French Camp. I loved my grandmother. She is the one who raised me. She was my most important family.

"My grandmother's name was Frances Teran. She was born in Chihuahua, Mexico, probably about 1893, and she was Mescalero Apache. Both of her parents were Apache so she was full Apache. She used to tell us some stories about when she was growing up. She remembered Pancho Villa. She didn't know him but when she was 9 or 10, she heard he was coming to the village where they lived and the women then took all the young girls into hiding. Pancho Villa had a dangerous reputation."

Born Jose Doroteo Arango Arambula in San Juan del Rio, Durango, Mexico, in 1878, Pancho Villa was a Mexican revolutionary and guerrilla leader. As to the women Pancho Villa might have met of the Mescalero Apache, they were formidable. The women learned to ride and hunt, some counseled men in battle strategy, they engaged in peace negotiations and were shamans, they were known for their ability to find water in arid climates, they could find and prepare food from a variety of plants, and they were always caretakers in charge of childcare which included hiding children from enemies and if necessary, taking up arms to defend their people.



"I don't know anything about my grandmother's parents. My grandmother was very secretive about her past. She came into the United States at El Paso, Texas, I'm not sure exactly when. She had six husbands, but she only married one. She spoke Spanish and English, but both my sister and I were brought up speaking English only. She wanted us to have every opportunity possible. Her personal goal was to become a naturalized citizen which she did do."

←Vern's grandmother, Frances Teran.

"My sister, Amelia, who is gone now, was three years older than me. Neither of us knew anything about our actual mother until we were older, and even then, not much. I thought my mother had died when I was a baby. I would ask, 'Where is my mother? Where is my mother?' And I would be told, 'She died.' But when I was quite a bit older, I learned that my mother, whose name was Trini, short for Trinidad, ran off with some fellow after I was born. Now my mother, my sister, me and a few more family members – including my mostly absentee father – all lived with my grandmother when I was born. My mother was 20 years old when I came into the world and 17 when my sister Amelia was born.

She and my father got together probably when my mother was 15. But my father wasn't there much for anyone, so somewhere in there, when he wasn't around, my mother met someone else. The story I got was

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she ran off with this fellow. She came back to live with us and this fellow came looking for her and threatened her. He told her he was going to kill my sister and me. So my mother left again and never came back. I don't know more details than that.

"My father's name was Donald Alonzo. But on my birth certificate, he is listed as Peter George. I have no idea why. My father was born in the Philippines. His father was a Spaniard. Probably when he was growing up, his last name was spelled A-l-o-n-s-o, but somewhere along the line, he changed that 's' to a 'z.'

"I also have no idea how he met my mother. I don't think he ever lived in Texas. When he came to this country, he lived in San Pedro, California, which is in Los Angeles County, between Manhattan Beach and Long Beach. The entire time I knew him, he only had two jobs, both short-lived. Just east of Marysville, California, just before the War, they were building an Army base, Camp Beale, in Yuba County, which much later became Beale Air Force Base. My father worked there. When we came to San Francisco, he worked at Mare Island Naval Shipyard in Vallejo, for a short time. I used to ask my grandmother, a lot, 'Why doesn't he go to work?' Finally she told me that from what she had learned about him, he was from a wealthy family in the Philippines and never had to work. So when he came to the United States, every time he needed money he cabled home and they sent the money. But he never gave the money to us. The only good thing I can say about him is he never physically abused us. He was my father, not my dad."

The first city Vern remembers living in as a child was Marysville and in 1940, the following family members were noted on the U.S. Census: Frances Teran, 47; Donald Alonzo, 35; Amelia Alonzo (Vern's sister), 11; Vern, 8; William Suvia, 20, Raymond Teran, 18; and Helen Teran, 15.

"We lived in different places. The family joke was, we moved every time the rent was due! We always had enough to eat, but nothing extra.

"When we lived in Marysville, we lived next door to the National Guard Armory. They used to pass food to me, you know, leftovers, instead of throwing it out. 'Hey kid, we've got some leftovers!' We lived in Marysville when the Japanese invaded Pearl Harbor (December 7, 1941). I was 9 years old and I remember that day. I also remember participating in the blackouts, which meant no lights on and keeping the windows covered in case there was any enemy aircraft overhead. I also recall the ration books. Of course, we were already living on low rations. Ha! Ha!

"We had a number of mouths to feed when I was growing up. My grandmother had four children, my mother, my two uncles and my Aunt Helen. Except for my mother, all the siblings lived with my grandmother, my sister and me. My Aunt Helen was eight years older than me. She and I got along great and when she was 15, my father married her." Vern stopped to laugh. "So my aunt became my stepmother. Complicated! But she was a great lady and I thought the world of her. My father did not stick around. He'd stay with us from time to time. But with all my family that lived with us, I got along with everybody and they all looked out for me.

"For a long time, my grandmother was the sole support and she worked many jobs, whatever was available to make a living: housekeeping, farm work, laundress. She was really my mom. When my uncles were old enough, they each got jobs after school and when they were teenagers, they both found work with the California Conservation Corps. This is during the Depression, so it wasn't a lot of money, but whatever they could give to my grandmother, they gave to my grandmother."

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The California Conservation Corps (CCC) was modeled after the federal Civilian Conservation Corps that President Franklin D. Roosevelt established during the Great Depression. The CCC helped build California's state parks and provided jobs for young men.

"Now my grandmother was very kind and actually pretty easygoing, but she did have a temper. If she got angry, she wouldn't hit you with her hand. She would hit you with what she was holding at the time. She also gave us noogies – a knuckle rap to the head. If we knew that was coming, we would run through the house with our hands over our heads.



"When we lived in Marysville and I walked home from school, she was very strict with me. She said, 'You go directly home and you stay there.' I didn't have anybody to look after me so that was the rule. One day, I was heading home and a friend of mine said, 'Hey, come on over. Let's play.' My grandmother came home and I wasn't there, so she came out looking for me. When she found me she said, 'I told you, you go home.' Then she said, without any explanation, 'Come with me.'

"She took me down to the City Jail. In those days, in the 1930s, it looked like a sheriff's office in an old Western. She said to me, 'See those guys there.' There were a couple of prisoners and yes, I did see them. I was in first grade. She said, 'See them. That is what is going to happen to you if you don't do what I tell you.' I started crying. I never did that again."

←Vern and his sister Amelia, ages 6 and 9, 1938, in Marysville, CA.

"My grandmother also had her mind set on what to give you, if you got a scrape. Thankfully, I only remember one time when I got the 'cure.' I was about 7. I had gone to this movie and in the movie they were

having a race. When the person came to the finish line, he broke the tape. I thought that was a pretty good idea. So I decided to string a cord across the street, from one side to the other, and when the cars would go by, with my bright idea, I thought they would break through the cord like they did on the track and it would be great fun. But I wasn't smart enough to let go of the cord when the car was coming through. I didn't let go until I felt pain in both hands. I had these big cord slices in both hands. I was crying and I was bleeding. I told my grandmother. She went and got a bottle of iodine and she said, 'Hold out your hands.' Oh, did that hurt. Talk about doing an Indian War Dance! That was her Indian remedy. If it hurt, that would fix you.

"One thing I pride myself on is at an early age, when I was 8, I figured out there was no money, and the only way I could have money was to go out and earn it myself, so I did.

"I used to go with my uncles, my stepmom and my grandmother to cut peaches. This was just across the river from Marysville, in Yuba City. First I watched them do it and then I got the bright idea, I can do this. They were preparing the peaches to go into this sulfur house to become dried fruit. You had a little ticket that they would punch every time they brought you a fresh lug. (A lug box is a food crate, designed

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for easy stacking.) At the end of the day, you got 10 cents a box. I didn't get as much money as my older family members did, but I did make some money. Of course, this was when hamburger was 10 cents a pound and bread was 5 cents a loaf.

"When I was 9, I got a job setting pins in a bowling alley. My uncle, who was going to high school, he used to go after school and set pins in the bowling alley. That's where I got the idea. My uncle told me, 'You can't go in there. You're only 9. That's not healthy for you.' So I used to sneak off and do it anyway. I went in and asked for a job and the manager said, 'Well you can't set pins. You are too short.' I said, 'I can do it.' So the manager showed me how to set pins. I wasn't strong enough to pull the rack down, so instead, I would jump out and push it with my chest. I guess the manager figured, this kid wants to work bad enough, I'll give him a job."

Being a pin boy was not easy work and it required serious focus. Flying pins or a wayward ball could cause some serious bruising, maybe even a broken rib.

"I did whatever I could to scrounge up some money. Whatever I made, I gave half to my grandmother. I was smart enough to know that she needed it. She really appreciated it and I felt good helping out. Once I started making money, what I didn't give to my grandmother, I would use to buy myself clothes and shoes. All my clothes up to that point were hand-me-downs or from the Goodwill."

When Vern was 10, the family moved to San Francisco. By then, Vern had a half sibling, Lillian, born in 1941. His father and his aunt/stepmom would eventually add two more children to the household, Anthony and Richard.

"When we moved to San Francisco, we stayed with some friends of my father's in the Fillmore District. I guess every once in a while my father showed up and did something. We didn't stay with these friends for too long. I went to Raphael Weill Elementary School for about six months. Then we rented an apartment in the Oceanview Neighborhood, not too far from Lake Merced. I went to Sheridan Elementary School and then Denman Middle School for sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth grades.

"I got a job delivering papers for the *San Francisco Chronicle* and I had a great boss. I got up at 5 in the morning and he used to pick us up and drive us over to Ocean Avenue where he kept the papers. Then you'd put them together and do your round. In those days I used to do a trade-off. The paper was a nickel. Sometimes, I would trade a paper for a bus ride. I learned that from my neighbor who was a little older than me. I took his route when he started high school. I had my route and his route. He trained me on his route which finished out near San Francisco State. When I went to put money on the bus to go home, he said, 'No, no.' Then he gave the driver a newspaper and the driver gave us a ride. We always had some extra papers, just in case. There was a bakery across the street and my neighbor would go to the bakery, knock on the door, hold up the paper and the baker would open the door, take the paper and give you a donut. It was a great trade, a paper for a donut. These were glazed donuts. I was telling my wife the other day, the glazed donuts back then were huge, now they aren't. But a bus ride and a donut; I did these trades every time."

Vern learned how to ride a bike when he was delivering newspapers and he bought his bike with the money he made.

The family moved to Clementina Street, South of Market, and Vern went to Mission High School.

"When I was in high school, I was on the track team and I played basketball with the lightweight team. Often I would tell the basketball coach, 'I've got to work. I can't go to the game.' Finally he told me, I couldn't stay on the team, if I couldn't play. I didn't do a lot of the high school experience. I didn't go to

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any of the proms. I didn't have a girlfriend. I was too busy working. I did try auto shop. I took it for one year. But I've never been good with my hands." Vern stopped to laugh. "The teacher said, 'Okay class, today we're going to show you how to weld.' We had a fender there with a gash in it and he said to me, 'Here's how you do it. Now you try it.' I tried it and the hole started getting bigger! The teacher said, 'I don't think this is for you.'"

Vern learned how to drive in high school, but he did not get his driver's license until after he got out of the military.

"This old guy had this Model T Ford. I asked him to show me how to drive, he said, okay, and after a while I learned how to drive. My family did not have a car and it's easy to get around San Francisco on the bus, so a driver's license was not a priority."

Vern graduated from high school, mid-term, January of 1950. He got a job at a coffee shop washing dishes out at Playland-at-the-Beach, a 10-acre amusement park located next to Ocean Beach along the Great Highway in San Francisco. He made 50 cents an hour, which was good money then, and the fellow who owned the shop let him eat his meals there. Again, most of that money went to his grandmother.

On June 25, 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea. On June 28, 1950, North Korean People's Army captured Seoul, South Korea's capital. On July 1, 1950, the first U.S. ground troops arrived in the large port city of Pusan (now Busan), Korea to support South Korea.

"When I was a kid, I had a neighbor who used to talk about the Coast Guard all the time. With that in mind, I went to enlist in the Coast Guard in San Francisco. I filled out the paperwork, everything was ready, and the enlisting officer said, 'Okay. We're going to send you to the Coast Guard Training Center Cape May in New Jersey. They are in the process of opening a training camp in Alameda but it is not ready because they have to get the barracks ready. So, for the time being, you are going to go to New Jersey. But they are all full right now, backed up. Go home and we'll call you.' I said fair enough and went home.

"This was September of 1950. I went home and all these guys I went to school with were being drafted because of the Korean War. I went back and talked to the Chief again. I told him, 'All my buddies are getting drafted. I'm going to be drafted next. Can't you put me in?' And he said, 'No, if we sign you up now, we'll have to start paying you.' I said, 'Well, I don't want any money, just sign me up.' He started laughing and he said, 'If we sign you up, we have to pay you.' He said, 'Go home, if you get a Draft Notice, don't open it. Don't even take it out of the mailbox. Come down here then and I'll see what I can do.' He was a nice guy.

"I got a call to go down and enlist. That was late October. I arrived at Cape May on Halloween. Did my Draft Notice come in the mail? Yes it did. I was back East about a month when the Draft Notice came. I told my grandmother, forget about it. They'll find me. They'll know why I am not there. I was lucky!

"I went to Cape May. I started out as an E-1, Seaman Recruit."

The Seaman Recruit was trained in seamanship, which means learning the fundamental skills of operating a vessel on the water, including navigation, boat handling and safety procedures.

"After training, it was typical military. At the end of your training, they ask you to fill out a questionnaire, 'Where would you prefer duty?' I wrote, 'The East Coast.' So, they sent me back to the West Coast. I didn't want to go home but they said, 'You go where they send you.' The guys that wanted to stay on the West Coast got sent to the East Coast. I ended up in Alameda."

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In 1951 the E-2, Seaman Apprentice, went aboard the USCGC Gresham. The ship's mission, which took place in the North Pacific Ocean, was International Weather Patrol, which included providing weather services and support for transoceanic aircraft. In 1950, the USCGC Gresham had weather patrol duty on ocean stations Nan and Oboe. In 1951, she added stations Uncle and Sugar to her duty. The Coast Guard cutter traveled with four civilian meteorologists. Time at each station was no more than three months and ended when a relief cutter arrived. Launching helium-filled balloons to measure air temperature, pressure and humidity; contacting passing aircraft and ships; providing radar and navigation fixes; checking the water temperature, every four hours, down to a depth of 450 feet; ship maintenance and boat drills – this was daily ship life.

On June 16, 1951, the Gresham was relieved on Ocean Station Sugar by the USCGC Chautauqua and she proceeded to Yokosuka, Japan for R&R.

"We were there maybe a week, but Japan was so interesting. It was not long after WWII, and while the U.S. occupation was still in place, which was really more of a

technicality at that point, American troops were able to wander around freely. I found out when you went ashore in Japan, you could use cigarettes and soap as trade. I didn't smoke, but we always used to get cigarettes for .06 cents a pack, so I had a lot to trade with. One of the days we were there, a buddy of mine and I took a train ride to Tokyo. I really enjoyed my time in Japan."



**The USCGC Gresham.**

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"I stayed in the Coast Guard for three years. I had been away from home for three years and that was enough. I thought there had to be something better. I did send my grandmother money. When I went to boot camp, I was making the enormous sum of \$75 a month, so half of that went home to my grandmother. Sometimes I would send more because I didn't need money. I had food, clothes, medical and a place to sleep. I didn't need anything. Guys would say, 'Let's go out.' But I would say, 'No, I don't have the money.'"

Vern left the Coast Guard on October 25, 1953, as an E-3, a Seaman.

"I moved back in with my grandmother. We were still living in the SoMa Neighborhood. I went to work in the warehouse of a mail advertising company. They sent samples in the mail. It was an okay job but I didn't like being stuck inside all the time. I went to work for a commercial laundry with the promise to get a teamster job, delivering laundry. That didn't work out. The boss liked the work I was doing in the warehouse so he took the teamster job off the table. I asked for more money but he didn't do that either. I left to try something different. A friend of mine and I used to go to this bar together. I didn't drink all that much, but that's where the guys went. So I went to work there tending bar. It was a great little spot called Angelo's. It was in the Marina, at Fillmore and Lombard, and besides being a bar they also did lunches and sold pizzas. I got along great with the guy who owned the bar and when his partner decided he wanted out of the partnership, this guy talked to me about becoming his future partner. Leaving a partnership and joining a partnership can be complicated and take time. While I did stay there for a while, in 1962 I changed jobs.

"A friend of mine had come looking for me. He said his boss was building a new commercial laundry out in the Bayview Neighborhood. He needed warehouse guys. He asked me if I wanted to give it a try and I said, 'Okay, I'll give it a try.' Thirty-three years later, I retired from Exchange Linen Service. The best thing about it was my boss. He was from an Italian family and he treated everyone like family. He was only six years older than me so we were more like brothers. I started in the warehouse and ended up as a purchasing agent. The company I worked for had four laundries, one in San Jose, one in Oakland, one in Santa Rosa, and San Francisco was the main office. It was good work and the boss was even better.

"Meanwhile, I used to play men's softball through the Pierce Street Annex. That was a really popular San Francisco club and bar back in the day, and they always had great music. We played softball with different businesses and it was a lot of fun. The Pierce Street Annex decided to get a women's league going. After a while, the bartender that was coaching the women's team said to me, 'What about helping me coach them?' I said okay. The bartender that was coaching them started telling me he couldn't coach various nights – but I still kept coaching. Finally he admitted he just didn't want to do it anymore so I became their permanent coach. That's how I met someone very special in 1968. JoAnn was on the team and I was her coach."

JoAnn Ewe worked as a medical transcriptionist at UC Medical Center in San Francisco. She had previously worked as a medical transcriptionist at UCLA Medical Center in Southern California and two of her friends had talked her into moving to San Francisco with them.

"The funny thing about her friends that talked her into moving to San Francisco was they got tired of San Francisco and moved back to Southern California. But she stayed and I am so glad she did, and I am forever grateful to her friends!"

On September 25, 1971, Vern and JoAnn married in Ventura, CA.

"Marrying JoAnn was the best decision I ever made. I was older when I got married, 39. But I didn't find the right person until I found JoAnn, and before I met JoAnn, I wasn't ready to go home every night. After



I met JoAnn, I was ready. I wanted to go home after work. I used to tell this fellow who came into the bar when I was tending, 'When you are married, you have to go home every night.' There would be these guys who would come in at 5 p.m. and at 8 o'clock, they were still there at the bar. The phone would ring and these guys would tell me to not let their wives know they were still there. But I would say to their wives, 'They are still here.' And I would tell these guys, 'You don't belong in a bar. You belong home.'

"JoAnn and I got along from the start. We have a lot in common and one of the things we always loved doing was fishing. When I got out of the Coast Guard, I took up fishing in streams in the mountains, in the Sierras. JoAnn's family was originally from Minnesota and then they moved to Southern California. She grew up in both places and she grew up fishing in lakes. She had never done any stream fishing until she met me. We would go trout fishing. I do know how to cook it up just right! Every year we would spend a week up in the Sierras fishing. We never got tired of it.

"When I married JoAnn, I married into a really nice family. Her parents were divorced, but they were great, both of them, and both her dad, first, and then her mom, would live with us later in life – and we were happy to have them. JoAnn was also really close to her aunt and uncle. JoAnn was an only child and her aunt and uncle only had one child, Terry. Terry was JoAnn's cousin, but really, they were like brother and sister. Terry died in Vietnam in 1969 which was really hard on everyone, and JoAnn became even more of a daughter to her aunt and uncle.

"My grandmother knew JoAnn and they liked each other. But they really didn't get to spend enough time together. I was working and JoAnn was working, and then we moved to Pacifica in 1973. My grandmother died in April of 1975. But long before then, her circumstances had really changed. I was able to help her buy a house on 2nd Avenue in the Inner Richmond District. I lived in that house too, until JoAnn and I married.

"My grandmother used to say, 'If God takes me tomorrow, I'll be happy because my children have never given me any problems and I have never been in jail. Life has been good to me!'"

When JoAnn and Vern married, they first moved into a home owned by Vern's stepmom Helen and her second husband, Bill Haines, in the Outer Sunset District. Helen's husband Bill had won the Irish Sweepstakes in 1960. Vern's family loved Helen's second husband – "he was such a nice guy" – and they were so happy that Helen's life had become easier.

"How did we get to Pacifica? A fellow, who had worked for us at the laundry, went to work selling real estate in Pacifica. He used to call me. 'C'mon, I'll show you a house.' Well, we weren't really interested at first because we liked where we were living in the Sunset just fine. But he called a lot. 'I can show you some good homes.' I got tired of him telling me about it so finally I said, 'Okay, we'll come down.'

"When I was a kid and I worked for the *Chronicle*, we used to drop the paper off at stores in the little towns that eventually became Pacifica in 1957. So, I knew where Pacifica was but I didn't know anything about it. The last time I had been down to Pacifica, it was a two-lane road."

In November of 1957, nine small coastal communities voted to incorporate and become the City of Pacifica. Those communities, now Pacifica neighborhoods, are: Fairmont, Westview, Pacific Manor, Sharp Park, Fairway Park, Vallemar, Rockaway Beach, Linda Mar and Pedro Point. (Linda Mar was previously Pedro Valley.)

"My friend showed us a couple of houses in Linda Mar, some at the front of the Valley, behind Safeway. But we told my friend, 'No, these houses are not for us.' Then he showed us the house we live in, a little further back in the Valley. It was owned then by a realtor who had done some of the improvements on the

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house himself. Some of them were a little slipshod, but we liked the house. Back then there was a housing boom and my friend told us if we were interested, we should make an offer. We had met the couple that had looked at it right before we got there, when they were on their way out. Fortunately for us, even though the wife in that couple really liked it, her husband needed some time to think about it. Our offer came in first and we have lived here since.

It was when Vern's father-in-law, M.Sgt. Marvin J. Ewe (Ret.), USAF, was living with the couple, that Vern joined the American Legion. His father-in-law did as well.

"My father-in-law and I were out front doing some yardwork and Ed Joyner was walking through the neighborhood with another fellow. Ed asked us, 'Are you guys, vets?' 'Yes we are.' He told us all about the Legion and JoAnn's father said, 'I think we should join.'"

Longtime Pacifica American Legion and VFW member, Ed Joyner had served with Jimmy Doolittle in the Second World War. Commander Doolittle was famous for leading a retaliatory air raid on the Japanese mainland in April of 1942.

"I grew up with a grandmother who did a lot for me and my siblings, so I learned by being a part of that, that you've got to help others. When I joined the American Legion, I did so both for the camaraderie, as I have mentioned, and to give back to my community. Both of these things are constants with the Legion and the VFW, and I am proud to be a part of both organizations."

Vern has served in every Pacifica American Legion and VFW officer position except Finance Officer and Chaplain.



Vern retired from the work force in May of 1995. JoAnn worked another decade plus.

"When JoAnn and I were working, JoAnn would come home and cook and I would cleanup. After I retired, she was still working, so I took over cooking because I didn't think it was fair. And now that I cook, I do cleanup also. I learned how to cook from watching my grandmother. My cooking is not bad, and the good news is, I've never killed anyone!"

←Vern and JoAnn are all smiles on their Alaskan cruise, 2015.

"JoAnn and I have been able to do a lot of traveling. I am very thankful for that. I didn't know that I would like traveling at first. I knew that I loved being in the mountains but one year, we decided to take a cruise. I wasn't sure I wanted to be on a ship, but we went ahead and signed up for a 7-day cruise to the Caribbean. Then we both decided, seven days was great, but it wasn't long enough. We needed 10 days! Cruise ships turned out to be one of my favorite things. We've been to the Caribbean, Alaska, and Scandinavia, and in 2004

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we were lucky to go on a Holland America Cruise in honor of the 60th anniversary of D-Day."

That cruise included visiting Omaha Beach where the Allies – which of course included U.S. troops – landed in 1944 and which opened the door to the Allies defeating the German Nazi forces. It also included stopping at the Normandy American Cemetery.



Vern at home, 4th of July, 2024.

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"Something else JoAnn and I have loved having as part of our family over the years is poodles. We have had a number of them and have been grateful to have had each one of them for many years – though it's never long enough.

"JoAnn and I have been married for 54 years, and while I won't quote my grandmother exactly on her reasons why life had been good to her, I will say, looking at my wife, thinking of all my family and thinking of my many decades on this planet, 'Life has been good to me!' But time sure doesn't get any slower the older you get."



Vern sitting down to be interviewed, March 4, 2025. (Jean Bartlett photo.)



Jean Bartlett is a longtime Bay Area features writer: Pacifica Tribune, Oakland Tribune, San Jose Mercury, Marin Independent Journal, Twin City Times, Ross Valley Reporter, Peninsula Progress, Coastal Connections, Bay Area Business Woman and Catholic San Francisco. She is a former Hallmark Card writer, a produced playwright and a published author. Jean's writing has been recognized by the Board of Supervisors, County of San Mateo, for "connecting community and preserving local history."

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