Engineer helped make big strides in tech, but also in volleyball, photography, Hawaiian music revival â?? and neighborhood connectedness

Description

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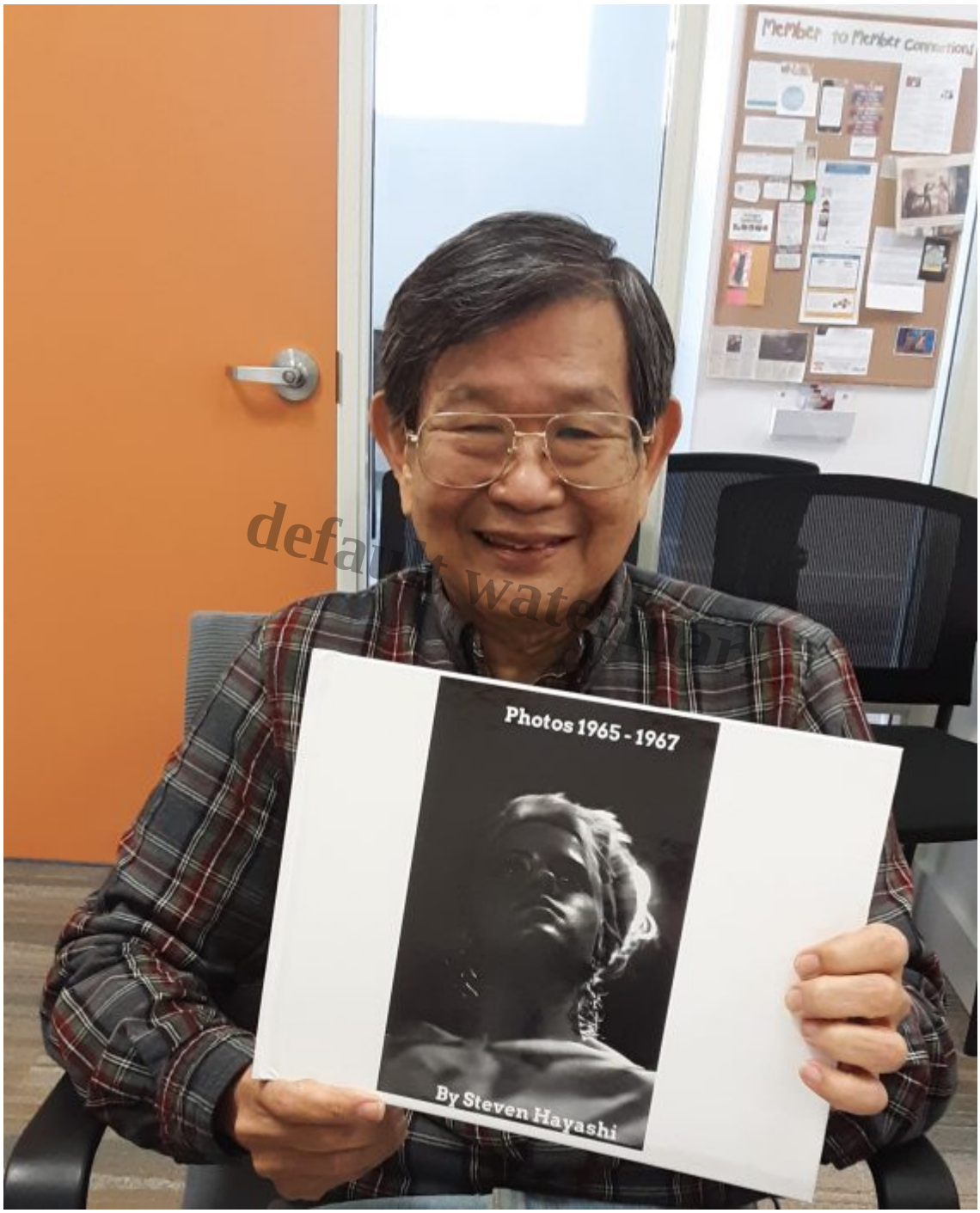
When any one of us does an online or in-person banking transaction, do we wonder about the â??what ifs?â?• What if our funds could not be retrieved? For the most part, we donâ??t wonder.

Thatâ??s because engineers like Steve Hayashi and his team at Tandem Computers were among the first to build a fault-tolerant computer system for use in online transactions, ensuring that banking, stock exchange and other commercial transactions continue without interruption when one or more of their components fail. Stratus Technologies was the other Silicon Valley company to design such system but Tandem became the dominant manufacturer.

Security in online transactions

â??In plain words, this was a system that ensured `business as usualâ?? at all times,â?• Hayashi said.

Now 77 and retired, Hayashi, says that work was a highlight of his 40 years as a high-tech team leader, at Tandem and Cisco Systems. He drove new product designs that led to the next generation of digital devices, including printers, disk drives, and Voice Over Internet Protocol phones. He even worked on surveillance systems for submarines.



Hayashi with a compilation of his photographs of rock stars like Joni Mitchell, Andy Warhol, The Jefferson Airplane, and Grace Slick. (Photo by Myra Krieger.)

Hayashi, an electrical engineer, has a sophisticated understanding of connectivity in the real world as well as the digital. With his ukulele, he shared his musical Hawaiian heritage with the San Francisco Bay Area. His early pursuit of photography led him to shooting the rock stars of the â??60s, but perhaps more significantly, linked him to the high school classmate who later became his wife. Athletic interests led him to glory in a seniors world volleyball competition. And the desire to connect with his Sunset District neighbors led him and his wife, Judy, to create a social network called Circles.

Hayashi retired in 2007. His counsel to others is simple: â??Do a good job; make your bosses happy.â?• Few people brag about the things they never did. Hayashi does. He never looked for work. He never angered his bosses, and they repaid him by taking him with them when they moved to better jobs, he said.

His first boss and mentor was his father, who owned and operated an electronics repair shop in Honolulu. At age 12, Hayashi learned the intricacies of customer service, troubleshooting and the repair of tape recorders, sound systems, movie projectors, and other equipment.

â??This is where I probably became impassioned with all things mechanical,â?• he said.

In the autumn of 1962, he moved from Honolulu to Boston to enter MITâ??s electrical engineering program. He lived at the Theta Xi fraternity house until he graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in 1966. By then he had made his adjustment to mainland American life. â??The guys in the fraternity house provided a nurturing environment; they became my brothers, and I learned a lot.â?•

Ukelele love

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Hayashiâ??s move to California in 1974 was prompted by a boss he had worked with at Systems Industries. â??I had identified and resolved the bugs in his systems and he wanted me by his side.â?•

When his former boss jumped to Tandem Computers and became a lead engineer, Hayashi joined him. â??I went with him and headed up the team which built the power supply for the worldâ??s first fault-tolerant computer system. This was a benchmark for me, co-leading a project which assures peace of mind for anyone who has a bank account or does business in the stock market,â?• he said.

A welcome diversion in this life of high technology â?? and still is â?? Hawaiian music; he plays the ukulele, often accompanied by his wife. They were part of the six-member group â??Na Hoaloha.â?• Performing at Kawikaâ??s Ocean Beach Deli once a month, they helped revive Hawaiian music in the Bay Area. Even though the restaurant closed, Hayashi has continued playing and takes weekly lessons via Zoom. He has traveled with his classmates to Maui and Oahu to play at ukulele festivals. Most of the songs are Hawaiian inspired. â??There are too many to pick a favorite,â?• he said.

Hayashi with some of the 30-member Na Ho Aloha band at a deli in Ocean Beach. (Photos courtesy of Steve Hayashi.)

Hayashi also freelanced on weekends as a wedding and events photographer while working in Silicon Valley. He had a darkroom in his apartment; business came by word of mouth. â??Weddings were labor-intensive; hundreds of pictures taken and lots of back and forth with customers.â?• But in later years this sideline was buzzing. He was hired to photograph artists and rock stars like Joni Mitchell, Andy Warhol, The Jefferson Airplane, and Grace Slick. He gathered the best pictures into a compilation, â??Photos 1965-1967.â?•

He got into photography in high school, taking pictures for the yearbook. That proved to be portentous and not just for his craft. A classmate from seventh-grade English asked him to take a picture of her: a gift for her boyfriend. Thirty years later they reconnected, marrying in 2000.

Keeping the boss happy

A more recent interest is volleyball. For the last 10 years, Hayashi has been the setter for volleyball team for The Huntsman World Senior Games. His role is one of the most important: getting the ball ready for teammates to smash over the net. Members of the volleyball and other teams, who come from all over the country, compete every year in St. George, Utah. Last year, his team won the bronze medal

in â??Volleyball Menâ??s 76+â?•.

Hayashi with his teamâ??s bronze medal in volleyball in the 2021 Huntsman World Senior Games.

In yet another venture, three years ago Hayashi and his wife started a Circles group in their Sunset district home. Basically, theyâ??re neighbors who socialize once a month in each othersâ?? homes. The group is a subset of the San Francisco Villages, one of about 50 such membership organizations in California established to build community among a neighborhoodâ??s seniors. â??Of course, with Covid, this all stopped and was resumed on Zoom which allowed for more participants,â?• Hayashi said.

Hayashi collaborated with contractors and used his skills to help with the build-out of the Village offices, a major project that included heating and air conditioning systems, iron gates, front doors, locking systems, noise abatement issues and more.

The coupleâ??s many activities donâ??t stop at the end of the day. Evenings in the city often include dinners out followed by visits to the opera or symphony as well as trips down to Palo Altoâ??s Theatreworks. They occasionally head to Stanford to cheer on the womenâ??s volleyball team.

In retirement, Hayashi has stayed true to his career maxim: Keeping the boss happy. These days, thatâ??s him.

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