



## From the President...

By Debby Weintraub

One of my favorite parts of working at Peralta was the constant exposure I had to diverse groups of people. Losing the daily contact with people whose lives I would not ordinarily cross paths with was one of my biggest hesitations about retiring and remains one of my greatest laments about leaving Peralta.



I taught English at Laney, everything from non-credit Basic Reading and Writing to transfer-level 1A and Critical Thinking courses. When I first came to work at Laney, there was so much I had to learn about the lives of my students. There was a world of racial and economic situations that I was ignorant about, despite my college education, political activism and upbringing in an educated and well-traveled family.

### MOMENTS OF AWAKENINGS

My classrooms were populated with 18-year-old students who had never ventured more than a couple miles from the neighborhood they grew up in, as well as middle-age folks who had spent weeks cramped on a boat inching their way from the horrors of war to the shores of a new and unfamiliar terrain. During the semester, students shared their writing, sometimes in small revision groupings, sometimes with the person the student was sitting next to, and, on the final day, with the whole class.

The pieces could break our hearts open, move us to tears, have us laughing, or simply nodding in recognition of the commonality of an experience. Potlucks at the end of the semester were filled with spices, ingredients and textures from the vast array of communities we all came from.

### QUIXOTIC ENDEAVOR

*Discover one retiree's saga as he tries to acquire Medicare A&B despite a series of setbacks from the Social Security Administration.*

Page 4.



Beyond the geographical and cultural differences were the age variations. I enjoyed having the “older” student whose perspective on learning and the value of an education set a different tone in the room. I loved watching the fashions, the shoes, the hair, hearing the music, the languages and slang of students who were decades younger than I. It was a wonderful revolving and evolving education.

I started working at Laney after I finished college as a tutor in the Right to Read Program. After completing graduate school and having two children, I returned as a part-time instructor. By the time I got hired full time, my children were off to college and I had become middle aged.

As my years accumulated at Laney, I had moments of awakenings. I recall sometime in the late 90's,

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maybe my first year as a full-time instructor, assigning a story by Anna Quindlen about whether a woman was a John or Paul girl. The point of the story was about whether a person was more a stick-to-the-rules type of person, conventionally good, or more rebellious in nature. But part of getting the point of the

***I SEEK THIS DIVERSITY AND  
TYPES OF OPPORTUNITIES NOW,  
BUT IT IS SIMPLY NOT AS EASY—  
IN FACT, IT IS DIFFICULT.***

story hinged on knowing who the Beatles were, and more specifically, John Lennon and Paul McCartney.

I was more than astonished when most of the late teen, early 20-something, African Americans in the class asked me who the Beatles were. It simply had never occurred to me that someone would not know of them. I thrilled at moments like that, at being given the opportunity to go beyond the world I lived in and to be made to think about how people living so near me had such different life experiences. I relished, too, watching the students engage with one another.

We were all enriched by our contact, sometimes confused, even upset, like the time I told my students during a discussion of whether prayer in public school should be allowed, that it might be difficult as there were multiple religions in the world, many of which, for instance, did not worship Jesus Christ. The exchange we had that day was difficult, but also eye-opening for all of us. Yet, we managed to talk, to explore, to read, write and to question and to come away a bit more educated.

I really miss that in my life. I seek this diversity and types of opportunities now, but it is simply not as easy—in fact it is difficult. Even though North Oakland, where I live, is diverse it is distinctly more white and middle-class than Laney.

I will always miss the richness that the Peralta Colleges brought to my daily life. So, it is good to break bread with fellow PRO members as we did at our annual members luncheon in November. It is a pleasure to sit with people who, like me, have known the students and the stories, whether we heard them in the classroom, the counselor's office, the Financial Aid or Registration Office. We heard them, they touched us, and we touched them. We are drawn together by this common experience.

I hope that as we go in to 2020, we are able to lean in to the good and that which connects us. I hope, too, that everyone will take seriously their responsibility to save democracy in part by making our public institutions and our communities safe and accessible to everyone. This is how I will try to stay connected to the parts of Peralta I loved. ♦

## **Peralta Retirees Organization**

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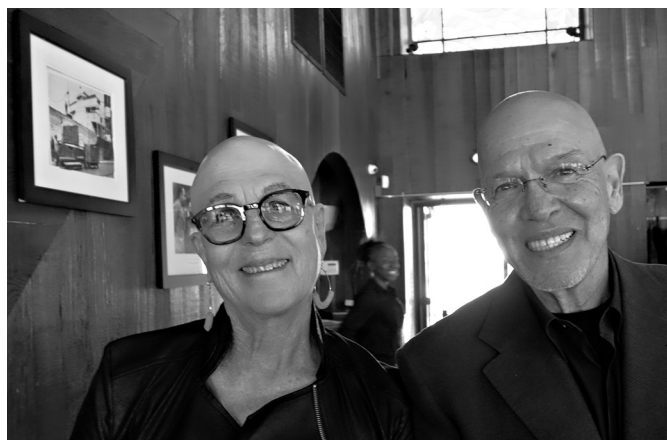
# PRO Annual Luncheon Draws Rave Reviews



More than 70 retirees and guests gathered Nov. 6, 2019, to enjoy a delicious lunch and greet former colleagues at Eve's Waterfront Restaurant on Oakland's Embarcadero, the first time the annual event was held at Eve's.

PRO President Debby Weintraub welcomed attendees with a short speech. PRO's former president, Jerry Herman, assisted by Vice-President Bruce Jacobs, organized the lunch.

*Clockwise from top: Bar, seating area and view; Myrtle Bennett and Jerry Herman; Jay Quesada (seated) and Barbara Southworth; Debby Weintraub and José Ortiz; Anna Roy, Jennifer Shanoski and Kayla Lewis; Becky Hsieh, Myrtle Bennett and Bill Sato. (photos by Felix Solomon)*



# Retiree's Spirited Quest for Medicare

By Burt Dragin

What could be simpler? Sign retirement papers, visit the Peralta District Benefits Office, fill out a few forms, apply for Medicare and wait for the wheels of the U.S. Social Security Administration to grind out my Medicare A&B card.

The Benefits Office had a raft of brochures, including, "How to apply online for Medicare," which promised, "It's so easy!" The tech-challenged among us see "it's so easy" and we sense doom. We see the chasm. Yet we plow ahead.

My 45-minute session on [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov) proved futile. So I dialed 1-800-Medicare (663-4227), a number I'd come to memorize over the weeks. "Your waiting time is one hour, 45 minutes."

Next came a visit to the Social Security Office in Berkeley. The Medicare literature urged appointments. "Just phone 800-663-4227." Not a chance.

I loaded the parking meter and strode up Allston Way to 2045.

The wait time was reasonable. At last, a real live Medicare expert to chat with.

Talk soon turned to quarters. *Quarters!* (Permit me one digression. Every few years I get a letter from the Social Security Administration directing me to come to the Berkeley office regarding my social security payments. "You're just three quarters short," I'm informed. After I explain that I belong to CalSTRS the offer is withdrawn. "Oh. Then you don't qualify for social security." So now I ignore these letters.)

## AN ALTERNATIVE PLAN

June 2019: "You're three quarters short," I'm told. "But I'm not here to collect social security," I explain. "I'm here to get on

Medicare." The young man is confused. He calls his supervisor, Mr. H.

"You're three quarters short."

"But I'm here for Medicare."

"You still need 40 quarters."

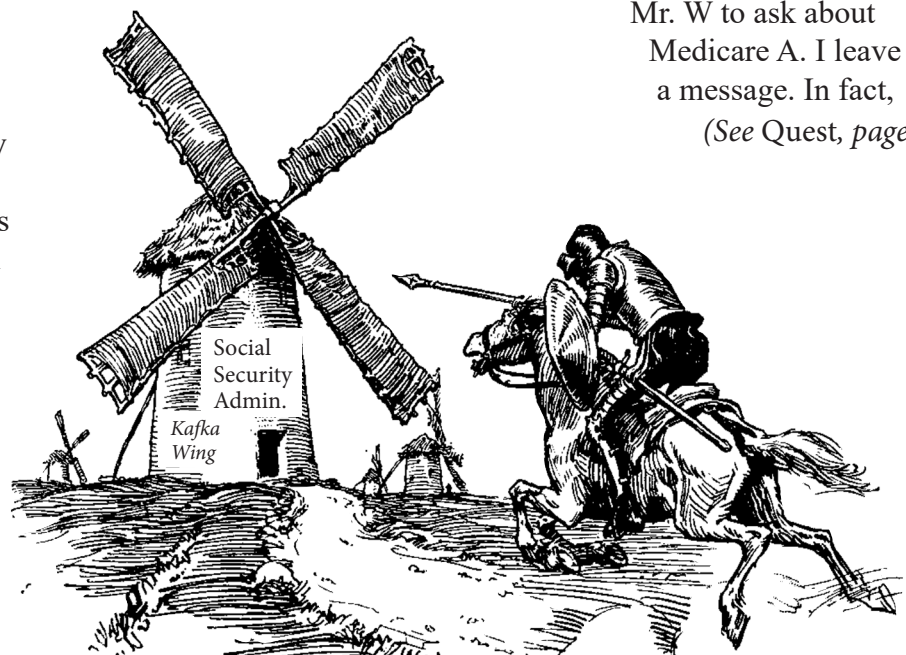
I'm flummoxed. Mr. H. appears to be on my side, and offers an alternative plan.

"If you get certified copies of your marriage license, divorce decree, and most recent CalSTRS payment receipt, we can get you on Medicare B." But not A? "You're past the enrollment period for Medicare A."

I make my first (of many) calls to Bruce Jacobs, PRO Medicare guru, who often sends me sections off the Medicare website, one of which is the Special Enrollment Period, which refutes what Mr. H. had told me.

Meanwhile, I get a call from Mr. W. at the Richmond Social Security Office who apparently knows my plight and assures me that I'll get my "Medicare A and B cards by the end of July." Who is Mr. W to make this offer? Whoever he is, he's half-right. By the end of July I get my Medicare B card. I phone Mr. W to ask about Medicare A. I leave a message. In fact,

(See Quest, page 5)



(*Quest*, from page 4)

I leave daily messages. No response. I'm back to Bruce and the Peralta Benefits office seeking solace, an explanation—help. No one knows why I can't get Medicare Part A. Bruce says I could purchase Part A and that the guy at the Berkeley office should have explained that to me. (I would later be reimbursed by the Peralta District.)

August 2019: I get a letter from Social Security explaining that I'm "not eligible for free Medicare hospital insurance."

This time I reach Mr. W. in Richmond. "The letter is correct," he tells me, blaming my retirement system. "CalSTRS has not been making consistent payments into the system," he explains. "They just pay \$500 every so often." Bruce finds this outrageous. "CalSTRS has nothing to do with Medicare."

More phone calls, more visits to the Benefits Office, whose two specialists make several phone calls on my behalf. Now I'm feeling the stress and worried that I may need hospital coverage. I compose a letter to Mr. H. at the Berkeley office with a copy of the Medicare website statement (Special Enrollment Period) showing that I qualify for enrollment within eight months of retirement. I drop the envelope off at the Berkeley office and return a few days later asking to see Mr. H. He seems miffed that I didn't accept his offer of help and insists that the website statement does not apply to me. Conflicting letters from the Social Security Administration continue to flood my mailbox. I'm most amused (or enraged) by those that open with section headings that assert in bold face type: "**Why we cannot pay you.**"

More plaintive phone calls to Bruce, more visits to the Benefits Office. What's going on? Have I stumbled into in a Kafka tale?

#### MY FAVORITE FREEWAY

Time to surrender. I print out my CalSTRS statement. I get a certified copy of my marriage license at

the Hall of Records in downtown Oakland.

For the divorce decree I must traverse the hellish 880 freeway to the Hayward Superior Court, Hall of Justice. I try instead a certified letter to the office with a stamped certified letter back to me. I include a check for \$45.50 to cover copies of the 62-page document. I foolishly expect this certified-letters exchange to happen rapidly. A week goes by. I phone the court clerk. "We should be getting to your request in a few days."

OK. Now I really surrender. The next day I'm on 880 south, dodging massive trucks, and cars whose drivers must think they're at Le Mans. I arrive in

Hayward frazzled, find the proper building, and pass through the airport-like security check. I emerge in bureaucratic hell. Lines of stupefied adults—some angry, some resigned to patience, some

clutching infants, others screaming at their marauding children. I check in, get a number and take a seat. A man who finally reached the clerk is berating her, outraged that he can't pierce the system. Several people in line stare at the boisterous scene, some with empathy for the man, others with pity for the clerk.

I'm soon uncoupled from the pain of my own saga, drawn into the lives of the less fortunate, citizens whose total stamina is required for daily survival. Ninety minutes later I've got the final piece of my Medicare puzzle. It's Friday, Oct. 18.

On Monday I bring the documents to Mr. H., who begins the ceremonial application. I contemplate my saga. Mr. H. remains miffed (or am I just suspicious?) because I tried to short-circuit the rules as he sees them. Mr. W. in Richmond sees the rules differently, but with a penchant for ignoring phone messages. Then there are the folks at the Benefits Office, and Bruce, who seems most informed but lacks the clout to print out my Medicare A card.

(See *Quest* for Medicare, page 10)

# 'Split-Roll' Initiative to Remake Prop. 13

The Attorney General of California has prepared a summary of the chief purposes and points of the proposed Split-Roll initiative, which includes “increasing funding for public schools, community colleges, and local government services by changing tax assessment of commercial and industrial property.”

The following analysis is reprinted from *Evolve, A Community Organization* (415-800-1155 | [campaign@evolve-ca.org](mailto:campaign@evolve-ca.org)).

## WHAT IS PROP. 13?

Proposition 13, or the People’s Initiative to Limit Property Taxation, was passed in 1978, stemming from concern over soaring property values and resulting in rising property taxes. It was championed by anti-tax activists Howard Jarvis and Paul Gann. Proposition 13 ensures valuations of property may not grow by more than 2% annually, and market value reassessment may only occur with a change of ownership. Additionally, Proposition 13 created the requirement that all state and local tax increases be approved by a two-thirds vote of the legislature or voting public.

## ISN’T PROP. 13 JUST FOR HOMEOWNERS?

No. Most voters are unaware of this, but Prop. 13 applies to commercial property as well. This aspect of the law has led to significant unintended consequences. For example, Chevron alone is saving over \$100 million a year by benefiting from Prop. 13’s Corporate Loophole. On average homes change hands in California every 10 years while some large commercial properties rarely change hands, so are rarely reassessed. Because of this the property tax burden in California has shifted onto residential property owners. Before Prop. 13, residential accounted for 55% of the property tax and commercial paid 45%. Now residential shoulders 72% of the tax burden while commercial only pays 28%.

## WILL REFORMING PROP. 13 AFFECT HOMEOWN-

## ERS?

This initiative will NOT change Prop. 13 for **any** residential property. Voters passed Prop. 13 to protect people, not corporate landowners.

## WHAT ABOUT APARTMENTS?

Apartments will not be affected either, nor residential renters of any kind. In mixed-use buildings, only the commercial part of the property will be reassessed at fair market value.

## WHAT ABOUT FARMS?

This initiative exempts all agricultural land.

## WHAT ABOUT SMALL BUSINESSES?

All small business properties with a market value of \$3 million or less shall be exempted from reassessment. If 50% or more of the square footage of a commercial/industrial property is occupied by small businesses (see definition below), the reassessment will be delayed until the 2025-26 fiscal year, or later if authorized by the Legislature. In addition, small businesses will be provided with direct tax relief through elimination of the tax on business equipment. This is a tax break worth \$1 billion a year.

## WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF A SMALL BUSINESS?

50 or fewer FTE employees in the state

The business is independently owned and operated

The business is located in California

The owner and officers of the business are residents of the State

The business is not dominant in its field of operations such that it can exercise a controlling or major influence statewide in the field of operation

## WON’T THIS BE BAD FOR BUSINESS IN CALIFORNIA?

No. The Prop. 13 Corporate Loophole doesn’t incentivize creating jobs or economic activity – it incentivizes land owners holding on to property for

(See Prop. 13, page 7)

*(Prop. 13...Continued from page 6)*

decades without doing anything productive with it. In fact, only 8% of commercial properties get 77% of the tax savings from this Corporate Loophole. Under the current system, two identical businesses side-by-side may pay drastically different property taxes. This penalizes new businesses by making them subsidize their established competitors' property tax. By leveling the playing field and bringing a minority of older commercial properties up to fair market property tax rates, we will be creating a healthier and more competitive business climate.

**WON'T THIS CAUSE BUSINESSES TO LEAVE CALIFORNIA?**

No. We are the only state in the country that does not regularly reassess commercial property. Most states actually tax their commercial property at a higher percentage than residential property. Texas, for instance, taxes their commercial property at 2.5% of fair market value. Our property tax rate will remain capped at 1%.

**WON'T BUSINESSES JUST PASS THE COST FOR GOODS AND SERVICES DOWN TO CONSUMERS? WON'T RENTS GO UP?**

No. Large commercial property owners don't share their Prop. 13 Corporate Loophole savings with

consumers. Prices for goods and services are based on the market, not on the property taxes a business pays. Have you ever received a Prop. 13 discount from a gas station, store or for office space? The answer is no.

Throughout California there are examples of gas stations across the street from one another charging the same price for gas, despite one gas station paying ten times less in property taxes. The only thing California consumers get from the Prop. 13 Corporate Loophole are underfunded schools and community services as well as higher taxes and fees.

**WILL THIS REASSESSMENT FOR COMMERCIAL PROPERTY HAPPEN ALL AT ONCE?**

No, this reform will be gradually phased in over time starting with the oldest properties first. This measure provides for compensation from revenues generated by the measure of administrative costs, including costs of the Assessors Offices, to implement the new system. It also directs the Legislature to consult with Assessors to develop a phase- in approach that begins in the 2022-23 fiscal year and extends over 2 or more years, allowing for reasonable workload, including an expedited process for hearing appeals. The phase-in period also applies to property owners who shall have a reasonable timeframe within which to pay any increase in taxes. After the initial reassessment is completed, all commercial and industrial property shall be periodically reassessed no less frequently than every 3 years as determined by the Legislature.

**AREN'T THERE OTHER LOOPHOLES THAT CORPORATIONS EXPLOIT TO AVOID PAYING PROPERTY TAX?**

Yes. Currently, commercial property owners can split up the purchase of a property amongst several parties in order to keep all ownership shares under 50%. By ensuring that no one entity owns more than 50% of a property, no property tax reassessment is triggered. One famous example is Michael Dell, the founder of Dell computers, who bought a hotel in Santa Monica for \$200 million but was able to save a million a year in property taxes by splitting up the purchase between multiple people. By instituting  
*(See Prop. 13, page 8)*

**Contributions Received for the PRO Scholarship Fund**

<b>Contributor</b>	<b>In Honor Of:</b>
Jerry Herman	Debby Weintraub
Susan Chin	PRO Board
Heo Park	Shirley Coaston
<b>Contributor</b>	<b>In Memory Of:</b>
Catherine Crystal	Sumiko Nakadegawa
Patrick McDermott	Robert Engwall
Susan Chin	Shirley Conner
Michael J. Wirth	Shirley Conner
Hector Edward Lopez	Shirley Conner
Mary A. Kearny	Ralph F. Kearny

(Prop. 13, from page 7)

regular reassessment of large commercial property, these tax evasions will no longer be possible because reassessment will occur every year regardless of the circumstances of the purchase.

**WHERE WILL THE NEW REVENUE FROM THIS REFORM GO?**

This will be local money that will stay local, and will not go to Sacramento. This is revenue that will fund our local schools, cities, counties, and special districts for services that we all rely on like health clinics, parks and roads.

In the 1970s, California was tied with New York for 5th in the nation in per-pupil education funding. Today New York spends twice what we do for education and we have the most crowded classrooms in the country. 40% of this revenue will go directly to our public schools.

The rest will go to our local governments that currently have no other choice than to levy regressive taxes and fees on individuals and small businesses just to make ends meet. Closing the Prop. 13 Corporate Loophole is the only way to restore over \$12 billion a year to our schools and community services without increasing taxes on homeowners or renters. ♦



**Dragin Takes Over PRO Editorship**

Long-time Laney College journalism instructor Burt Dragin takes over the editorship of The Peralta Retiree with this issue. Helene Maxwell was editor for two and 1/2 years. Dragin brings varied experience to the volunteer post, including his tenure as faculty advisor to the award-winning Laney Tower newspaper.

Dragin, who retired in May 2019, is the author of *Six to Five Against: A Gambler's Odyssey*, along with freelance and op-ed pieces that have appeared in the *New York Times*, *LA Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Image Magazine*, *Oakland Tribune*, and other publications. "I look forward to working with the PRO leadership," Dragin said. "And with Felix Solomon, assistant graphics editor. Felix was an employee of the Laney Journalism Department and contributed a great deal to the Tower's success." ♦

**Where Have You Been?**

The PRO newsletter seeks first-person articles and photos from your travels as a newly minted retiree or veteran who has been to Burma or Zanzibar or Oman or The Ozarks or New Orleans or Grand Teton National Park or Wales or Guanajuato or—anywhere on this earth. Contact the editor at [burtdragin@aol.com](mailto:burtdragin@aol.com).

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*Contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowed by federal and state law.*



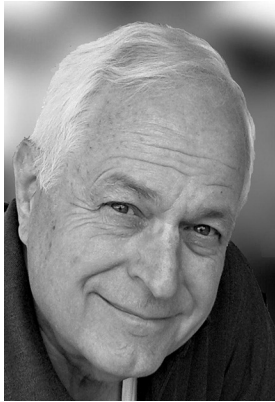
## OBITUARY

# Don Petrilli, Graphic Arts Instructor

*From The Independent of Livermore, Calif.*

Donald Ray Petrilli, 72, passed away on November 20, 2019 following a two year battle with cancer. He was surrounded by his family.

He was born in Long Beach, California on January 2, 1947, to Betty Jean and Alfred Patsy Petrilli. At age 17, he joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and served a full time mission from 1967 to 1969 in Southern Germany.



Don Petrilli

In 1970, he married his sweetheart, Jean. Shortly after the birth of his second child, he received his Bachelor of Arts degree from California State University Long Beach. In 1972, he moved his family to Livermore where he taught graphic arts and photography at Livermore High School.

In Livermore, they would add three more children to the family.

In 1980, he opened a printing business in Livermore and ran it until 2000, when he returned to his passion of teaching graphic arts, this time as an instructor at Laney College in Oakland. For a period of time, he was the chair of the graphic arts department. He retired in December of 2015.

He was a talented athlete and dedicated a large portion of his life to playing and coaching volleyball. He coached at many different levels including high school, club,

community college, collegiate club and professional volleyball. His passion for teaching and coaching allowed him to be an influence for good in countless young lives, including his own children.

His opportunities to serve and teach others extended into his church service as well. Don served faithfully throughout his life in several capacities including as Sunday school teacher, young men's advisor, adult men's leader, missionary, family history consultant, and Boy Scout leader. His most recent service prior to his passing was to serve in the Oakland CA Temple. This brought him great joy.

He was a loving father and grandfather, generous with his time, frequently attending his children's and grandchildren's events. He loved to travel, and took a particular interest in Italy due to his Italian heritage, visiting there eight times throughout his life, and twice in his last year.

He is survived by his wife of nearly 50 years, Jean; five children (and their spouses) Jeanette, Daryl (Claudia), Monica (Darren), Andrea (Ryan), and Vince (Ashlee); 11 grandchildren and his sister Patsy.

In lieu of flowers, please visit Don's St. Jude memorial fund page (link below) to support St. Jude's lifesaving mission to continue the fight against cancer by making a donation. He will be missed. ♦

<http://giftfunds.stjude.org/DonaldRPetrilli>

## Welcome New Members

*PRO welcomes the following members who have recently joined*

**Herb Kitchen**  
**Sedique Popal**

## IN MEMORIAL

*The following Peralta retiree has passed away. PRO extends our deepest condolences to her family and loved ones.*

## Ida Pound

Longtime College of Alameda instructor Dr. Ida B. Pound died on January 30 at the age 96. Dr. Pound taught at Skyline High School before moving on to College of Alameda in 1970, the year the campus opened. The full story of Dr. Pound's life and accomplishments will appear in the next PRO newsletter.

*Please contact Burt Dragin at: [burtdragin@aol.com](mailto:burtdragin@aol.com)*

(**Quest**, from page 5)

Mr. H. looks at his screen, where my entire life is on display.

“You’re now just two quarter short,” he announces.

“What?”

“Yes, you earned \$500 last year, which counts for one quarter.”

“But I taught through all of 2018,” I explain. “And got paid.”

“No, you just earned \$500.”

Of course! I got extensions and filed my income tax form late. The \$500 was for a freelance article I wrote for the Cal Alumni Magazine. Had I understood about “the quarters” a few years back I easily could have earned the \$1000 to bring me to 40 quarters.

Mr. H. notes the late tax form filing and continues to ask me obscure but life-affirming questions about my work history. Between his queries, I wonder

what really happened? Why would the Peralta District not pay in to my Medicare?

Bruce later quotes me the “official” word: “PCCD doesn’t take out Medicare because federal Medicare law precludes taking out Medicare taxes for Cal-STRS members hired before March 1, 1986; that is, government employees who do not pay into social security. The law was changed in 1986 but only for new hires.” I was hired in the ’70s.

I complete Mr. H.’s interrogation.

“When should I expect my Medicare Part A card?”

“In a few weeks,” he replies, not a hint of “congrats.”

Sure enough, in early November a Medicare A&B card arrives in the mail. I’m elated. But where’s the punchline? This thing should end brimming with irony. And there it is on my new card. It seems that I had acquired Medicare Part A coverage on March 1, 2019—three months before my retirement! You could have fooled me. ♦

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