

Howard Daniel

I go by two first names — Howard Daniel — or two last ones. Take your pick.

My wife Sandra and I live in the Shamrock Mobile Home Community, about a mile north of Shiloh Road. This is a second marriage for both of us, and between us we have three kids, now all about 50, and five grandkids. We're here thanks to our younger daughter, Melissa, who lives in Santa Rosa. Our other two kids — Naomi and Adam — live in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and Washington, D.C. Having lived my first two-plus decades in what I now call Snowy Winter/Sweaty Summer Zones, moving here in 2013 was a no-brainer — my specialty.

Sandra, a teacher whose career took her from grade schools to community colleges, is now retired, but I still work, part-time, as a business writer and editor. I call this gig Pen-for-Rent. So while I'm sometimes tired I don't consider myself RE-tired.

I was introduced to SIRs by Jim Strange whom I met a few weeks ago at the gym. Jim suggested I check out a Tuesday coffee, and I've found in the several times I've now been at a coffee and at bocce ball (I'm a total novice!) that I've greatly enjoying getting to know guys who have been around the block pretty much as many times as me.

Sandra's a California girl — originally from Santa Barbara. I grew up on the New Jersey coast a little over an hour's drive from New York City. In high school I found I had a knack for writing, and by my senior year I was editor of our weekly student newspaper. I went to college in New England where I turned my interests in history, current events and language into a Russian Area Studies major. I then spent two more years earning a master's in that field.

Grad school gave me my first big life lesson: that I didn't want an academic career. My first post-university job, as a Peace Corps volunteer, was in a village in India where I worked with farmers growing new strains of wheat that can quadruple crop yields. This was in 1968-70 — the second-most-interesting two years of my life.

After several months traveling home across Asia, I joined the U.S. Foreign Service where for 15 years I was posted to U.S. embassies and consulates in Brazil and the USSR and enjoyed several interesting Washington assignments and another in Japan. In Brazil I added Portuguese to the Russian and Hindi I'd previously learned. (I can still fake it in Brazilian, Russian and Indian restaurants.)

My USSR post was at our consulate in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), the Soviet Union's second-largest city. Thanks to the people I met there and the first-hand experience of the totalitarian country I studied, those two years, 1976-78, were THE most interesting of my life.

I left the Foreign Service in 1985 and moved to Hawaii for an opportunity on an entrepreneurial project that didn't ultimately pan out. But Hawaii is where I met Sandra. It's also where I landed my first full-time writing job, as the governor's speechwriter. I then went into public relations, where I mostly wrote for clients and edited my colleagues' writing, making it as clear and engaging as possible.

When Sandra retired, we moved here to be a few thousand miles closer to our kids. I continue to write and edit. It keeps me active and my brain engaged, and I greatly enjoy its creativity, so it's not most people's idea of work. Anyone interested can see tales from my experiences living and working around the world on my Pen-for-Rent blog (<https://pen4rent.com/braindrops-a-blog>).