

Happy Birthday, Charlie!

On Oct 24, 2015, PBB members, friends and family gathered to celebrate a very special event—Charlie Tagawa's 80th birthday. And what a wonderful party it was! It was held at Hong Fu Restaurant in Cupertino, one of Charlie's favorites and we can see why—the food was wonderful.

The woman behind the scenes who pulled it all together was long time member Joanie Goldstein. We all owe Joanie a debt of gratitude for making this memorable party happen.



Joanie (right) with daughter Rachel and granddaughter Sydney.

There were tributes, of course, spoken, sung and played.

The tributes from Arlene Okerlund and from Joanie are reproduced in the following pages. Mary Horne and Chris Bracher spoke and remembered their early days in the Junior Band and later in the PBB. John Krakar sang a tribute to “the leader of the band.”

We wish we could reproduce the wonderful musical tributes that came from Bill Lowrey, (with daughter Katie), Pat Dutrow, Leon Tagawa, and Kevin McCabe.

What A Wonderful 80th Birthday Party It Was!



Charlie's family was there. Shown are Grandson Brendan, Charlie, son Leon and Leon's wife Heather. Grandson Dylan was there but had to leave early.



Joanie arranged for a special dessert – cupcakes PBB style.

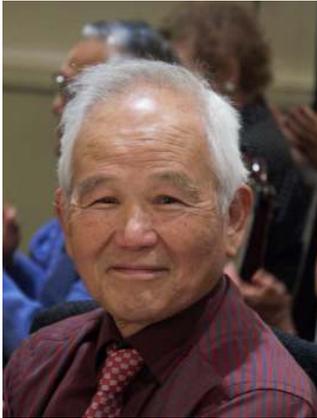
Photos in this issue come to us from Tom Faith and Eileen Yumet.

Many thanks to Tom and Eileen for recording this very special event.

THIS IS A SPECIAL ISSUE OF THE PBB NEWS AND VIEWS CELEBRATING CHARLIE'S BIRTHDAY. THE NOVEMBER ISSUE WILL BE AVAILABLE SOON.

Thank You to Everyone

CHARLIE TAGAWA



On Saturday, October 24th, the PBB was generous to host a birthday celebration on my behalf at Hong Fu Restaurant in Cupertino. When I arrived, the banquet room was already full of people that were standing and talking. I was very surprised to see some unexpected friends, some of which came a long way to be there. Mr. and Mrs. Steve Harris came all the way from Sacramento. Mr. and Mrs. Tom Brullet, one of my students from Berkeley, who is a very good tenor banjo player that plays in the Oakland and East Bay Banjo Bands. Tom had a two hour lesson earlier in the afternoon. Gary Kerr, a long-time friend and well-known plectrum banjo player from the East Bay area was also there.

Dinner started around 5:45 PM with everyone at round tables. It seemed like everyone enjoyed the dishes very much. As the festivities began, John Kraker sang and played an original song that was written just for the occasion – Thanks, John. Bill Lowery and his daughter, who played the violin, performed next. I had never heard the tune they played but it was very well done. Bill's wife, Diane, was listening with a warm smile. Bill has played so well for so many years. It was also good to see him as a proud parent. Bill then invited Kevin McCabe to play a Banjo Jazz-style duo and Pat Dutrow joined them for a memorable trio.

Kevin was one of my early students in the late '60's! As many of know, he is a very talented banjo player. He played at many of our banjo jubilees as a featured artist. He played the great solo for *Sweet Georgia Brown* on our CD – Just One More Time. On that performance, and at Jubilee performances, Kevin always donates his payment back to the PBB.

Pat Dutrow came from Fremont with his father. He is one of the most well-known tenor banjo players in the Bay Area with the Dixieland Jazz Society.

Arlene Okerlund did a speech about my early life. Several people at the party told me that Arlene, who is a retired San

Jose State University professor, was a wonderful presenter for the evening. Thank you, Arlene. Chris Bracher and Mary Horne both spoke and brought back memories of the Junior Band. I have always been very proud of that group.

I would like to thank everyone else that attended or participated, but I don't have enough space to express my gratitude to all of you, so please forgive me for not mentioning you by name. I would also like to give a big thank you for all of the generous gifts I received.

This event would not have happened without Joan—what a wonderful gift she gave me. Chris, Bill Lowrey and Jim Strickland all helped make it special. Thank you all for organizing the party and the hard work it took to make it happen. Thanks to Tom Faith and Eileen Yumet for taking all the pictures of the evening. It was also great that your spouses and the other family members that were there to attend.

I am a very lucky person. I chose to play the banjo and it has brought me to a place like no one ever has for almost 60 years. I, myself, do not know many banjo players that played professionally for more than a decade. If I did not pick up a banjo, I would have not come to this country. I deeply respect the banjo itself. It has brought so much happiness to me, personally, over the years and I have seen how it makes others happy as well. When Harry's Hofbrau is full of customers and they applaud the band and leave good tips, it is because they enjoyed our playing very much.

Before closing, I would like to give one more thanks to Joan and everyone that helped make this such a wonderful event. Also thanks to the Board of Directors for the gift from the band and to all of you for your gifts. What a surprise. This was a wonderful evening.

Also thanks to the Board for support over many years and to the band for what you do every week.

Now I am going to Japan. Many of you know how important this annual trip is to me and your gifts will make it even better.



The Evening in Review

JIM STRICKLAND

When Joanie asked me to act as emcee for the evening, I was thrilled to accept, because in that role, I could speak first.

I pointed out that Charlie:

- is a great Banjo player—just ask the National Four-string Banjo Hall of Fame which inducted him in 2003;
- is a wonderful banjo teacher—with hundreds of students, many of whom (by a show of hands) were at the party;
- had donated over 10,000 hours of his time over the years;
- which enabled the PBB to donate over \$225,000 to many bay area charities.



With that intro, I introduced Joanie.

Charlie's 80th Birthday Party

JOANIE GOLDSTEIN

Thank you all for coming tonight. It's wonderful to see everyone. Charlie's family, band and auxiliary members and so many faces from the past. (You notice I did not say. "old faces.")

All of us are here tonight to honor Charlie. The planning of this party has been a real labor of love. The idea came to me over a year ago. Originally I wanted this party to be a surprise. I thought about it and realized that you can never surprise an old banjo player--their senses are already numbed! By not making the party a surprise, Charlie has been able to look forward to it for 10 months and I've had almost a year to drive the Board of Directors crazy.

So Charlie will be turning it 80 at the end of this month. What better way to honor a Japanese banjo player than to eat Chinese food, talk about him and play the same songs that he has heard for 50 years.

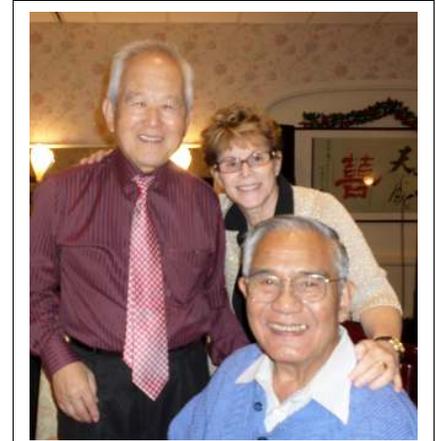
We want to honor Charlie tonight because there comes a time in all of our lives when we will have to go up to the pearly gates. And when Charlie arrives (hopefully many years from now), Saint Peter will say to Charlie, "I want to



let you into heaven but you need to tell me what have you done on earth that has some value."

Charlie thinks about it and he eagerly replies, "Well I have taught over 200 students and now they all play the banjo." Peter looks at Charlie and says, "I asked you to tell me something you have done that has VALUE."

Of course in all seriousness I could go on for hours telling you all of the things of value that Charlie has done for the PBB the banjo community and the community at large. We'll have other speakers tonight who will elaborate on Charlie's accomplishments.



Joanie with Charlie and long time friend and member, the best banjo player from Maui, Jimmie Min.

Just for the fun of it I got my calculator and after crunching the numbers, I realize the Charlie has:

- been the director of the peninsula banjo band for over 50 years;
- has attended and has led over 1700 and playouts;
- has led over 2500 Tuesday when day Wednesday practice sessions;
- has attended over 400 board of directors meetings;
- has led over 25 BBB jubilees.

So if nothing else we need to thank Charlie not just for his endurance but for all the miles that he's put on his car.

Again I want to thank you all for coming tonight on such a special occasion and celebrating with all of us.

The photo's of Charlie's 80th Birthday Party taken by Tom Faith are still going through the edit, cropping and post processing steps. After he completes the work, he will provide a link to Flickr so that our members and fans on the mailing list can enjoy them too. The Flickr link will not exceed your electronic device memory capacity.

Thank you for your patience.

Arlene Okerlund was the second speaker. She gave us a wonderful biography, of Zenzo, "Charlie" Tagawa.

Zenzo to Charlie: An Improbable Life

ARLENE OKERLUND

One Saturday evening in October 2015, seventy people gathered in a Chinese restaurant in Silicon Valley to celebrate the 80th birthday of a Japanese *maestro* of the American banjo. Most people in the room had taken banjo lessons from Charlie Tagawa. All were there to pay tribute to his virtuoso skill with the banjo.



Charlie Tagawa has students scattered throughout the world, but his influence is particularly notable in the larger Bay Area, where banjo bands play regularly from Sacramento to San Francisco, from the East Bay to the Peninsula. Charlie has directed the Peninsula Banjo Band for 50+ years and performs regularly at annual banjo extravaganzas throughout the region.

He has created no less than a musical culture—a culture of banjo music. He has built a legacy.

How improbable is that? For a guy born in Tokyo, Japan, on October 27, 1935, and named Zenzo Tagawa?

Zenzo's father, Kiyoshi, a rice broker proud to be the third generation of his family born in downtown Tokyo, owned a rice store until World War II broke out. His mother, Tomiko, raised a family of seven in which Zenzo is the second son. He has two sisters.

Zenzo's early memories include walking to kindergarden with his grandfather one morning, when his grandfather said: "Today, Japan started a war against America." Zenzo's family, except for his father and himself, soon evacuated to the countryside. Zenzo and his father moved to a house close to Japan's most famous temple, Asakusa Kan Non-Sama, in the center of Tokyo's busiest section.

During grammar school, Zenzo went home alone and spent his afternoons lying flat on a tatami mat, reading. He remembers 1944-- lying there and hearing the sound of a siren. Soon, formations of B-29s were flying over, dropping incendiary bombs from the sky.

That winter, his father evacuated Zenzo to a small school in Makuhari, a bayside area about 20 miles from Tokyo. (Disneyland is located there today.) Every night the air-raided sirens sounded, and the children ran from the dormitory into a shelter.

On March 10, 1945, the children left the shelter about 2:00 a.m. As Zenzo emerged, he saw the children in front of him all looking in the same direction and crying. Zenzo turned to see the sky above the horizon glowing red as far as he could see. Tokyo was burning, the result of carpet bombings that almost obliterated the city. Zenzo's house was there.

A week later, Zenzo was summonsed to the teacher's office. There sat his father, his coat flecked with quarter-size holes burnt into it, his eyes badly smoked. "Pack up your stuff," his father said. "We do not have our house in Tokyo anymore. I came to take you to your other family." Zenzo joined the rest of his family in a small town in Ibaragi Prefecture, about 100 miles from Tokyo.

After the war, his father returned to Tokyo to work in the rice division of the government. Zenzo joined him there for middle school. When he started high school, his family moved back to Tokyo.

After graduating from high school, Zenzo entered Senshu University to study economics. Like many college students, he played the guitar. Then, a \$20 bill got him into a lifetime of trouble. Twenty dollars was worth a lot more in the 1950s than it is now, and you'd think an economics major would know better.

In the summer of his senior year at Senshu University, a high-school friend called him and said, "I bought a new musical instrument." Zenzo stopped by his friend's home where he saw a used tenor banjo—an inexpensive Gretsch banjo from an American army camp.

Zenzo strummed it—it sounded "clean and pretty." After holding it for just a few moments, he knew that his destiny had changed. He knew that banjos were pretty much "in oblivion," but right then and there, Zenzo Tagawa determined to change that. He was going to make the banjo popular. A \$20 bill bought Zenzo his first banjo.

In January 1956, Zenzo became a student of Mr. Takashi Tsunoda, Japan's top banjo/guitar artist, who had an exclusive contract with Japan's Columbia Recording Company.

Mr. Tsunoda responded to Zenzo's request to take banjo lessons:

"I don't mind teaching you how to play the banjo, but if you have a desire to make money, it is wrong because even I can hardly get a job playing the banjo."

Three months later, Zenzo Takawa graduated from Senshu University with a bachelor's degree in Economics and a banjo in his hand.

He joined a local Country and Western band, playing lead banjo at a cabaret named "Funabash" in the suburbs of Tokyo. In 1959, he changed his style to Dixieland jazz and played with the Dixieland Dukes as a soloist for three years. In 1962, Zenzo moved to the Gaslight Club, an upscale

steakhouse that catered to foreigners, where he was the featured soloist accompanied by a piano player who was Filipino. He developed his repertoire to over 1,000 songs.

Zenzo has two special memories of the Gaslight Club: one night an American serviceman was sitting by the piano and called out: "Hey, Charlie, play something." His piano player said to him, "You're Charlie now." Charlie Tagawa was born, not quite 30 years old.

Another night, a waitress whispered in his ear: "Mr. Carmichael is having dinner in the dining room." The only "Carmichael" Charlie had ever heard of was Hoagy. Obviously, they had to play something written by him. They decided that *Stardust* was too easy, too well known. So they began the slow and beautiful *New Orleans*.

Charlie (who sees everything) watched Hoagy stand up, walk through the bar, approach them, and ask: "How do you know this tune?" Charlie's response was so typically Charlie: "THIS IS OUR FAVORITE TUNE!"

In 1964 the Olympics arrived in Tokyo, and Charlie noticed a gentleman who kept returning to the Gaslight Club for dinner. One evening the gentleman approached him and asked if he would accept a contract to play in a restaurant he owned in northern California—America.

This was not Charlie's first job offer. Others had come from Sydney, Australia, and from New York City, all declined because he had just married his lovely wife, Masako. He liked his job at the Gaslight Club where he was doing quite well.

This time, however, Charlie thought a bit longer. His hero Harry Reser lived in America, and he thought that he might have a chance to meet him. This time Charlie said "yes."

August 1965 found Charlie Tagawa in Mt. View, California, playing at the Sakura Gardens. He took on side jobs, including a church in Los Altos, where a gentleman introduced himself as Glenn Atkins, a member of the Cupertino Banjo Band (CBB) that had an upcoming gig at a Cupertino Church. Charlie joined the 4-5 banjos and one gut-bucket led by Chuck Ray. One of the members owned Straw Hat Pizza in Campbell, where the CBB played every Monday night.

When Chuck Ray moved to Arkansas in 1973, Charlie became the leader of the CBB.

In 1974 the CBB changed its name to the Peninsula Banjo Band (PBB) with Charlie as its first President and its Music Director, a job he has held for all but two years.

He also fulfilled his dream and became a protégé of Harry Reser, who advised Charlie on perfecting his single string technique.

In 1972, Charlie created the Junior Banjo Band for kids ranging in age from eleven to sixteen. During the summer of 1976, twelve Junior Band members and three mothers

toured Japan, covering 1,200 miles and 13 cities—from Tokyo to Nagasaki. They played in a banjo jubilee in Tokyo sponsored by the Alligator Jazz Club.

Back home the Junior Banjo Band played in the PBB Jubilee, the Sacramento Banjorama, and the Southern California Banjo Spectacular. They performed at Marriott's Great America and various local clubs. In 1975 they recorded an LP record.

Meanwhile, Charlie was leading the PBB in performances at Candlestick Park, the 50th anniversary of the Golden Gate Bridge, the San Francisco Black and White Ball, and the SF Mayor's Convention (although there he had some competition when Willie Brown wanted to direct the Band). The PBB was featured on television's Channel 5, *Evening Magazine*, and Channel 4, *California Backroads*.

Charlie has directed the PBB at warm up shows for Pattie Page, Captain & Tanille, and the Preservation Hall Jazz Band. Still today--every Wednesday night--the Band plays at Harry's Hofbrau in San José (the fun starts at 7:00 p.m.) and at many private events throughout the year.

Noted for his teaching and his professional performances, Charlie's career has been filled with honors:

- Elected "Best Banjo Player of the Year" at the New Orleans Jazz Club of Northern California (1967).
- Elected "Most popular 4-string banjo player of the year" by FRETs, a national stringed-instrument magazine (1982 and 1983).
- Inducted into the National Four-String Banjo Hall of Fame (2003).
- Directed the PBB recording *THAT CHARLIE SOUND*, which features Charlie and his sons Nori and Leon in three solos (2008).

Sons Nori and Leon are *almost* as good as Charlie on the banjo. No pressure, of course, on Leon's wife, Heather, and Charlie's three grandsons: Ryan, Brendan, Dylan.

From Zenzo to Charlie Tagawa, this banjo virtuoso has created both a personal and a musical legacy.

What an improbable life!



Next came several musical tributes. The first came from John Krakar. John sang, *Charlie's Band*, to the tune of *MacNamara's Band*.



Charlie's Band

Lyrics by John Krakar
sung to the tune of *MacNamara's Band*.

Oh, you know his name is Charlie he's the leader of our band,
And when it comes to leaders he's the finest in the land.
He starts us right he keeps us tight, oh that's just what he will do,
And that's the way we want to play, yes, when we play for you.
Oh, yes it's really true,
He leads the band that's here to play those great old songs for you

Oh, he starts some fast he starts some slow and other tempos too,
And if you ask him really nice he'll play a song for you.
And when he sees some little ones he will play one for them too.
And that's the way we want to play, yes, when we play for you.
Oh, yes it's really true,
He leads the band that's here to play those great old songs for you. That's really true

The next tribute was from Bill Lowrey on the banjo and his daughter Katie, now Katie Hillary, playing violin. They played the beautiful Ashokan Farewell.

Pat Dutrow, former student of Charlie, member of the Junior Band and the PBB joined Bill.



Bill Lowrey and Katie Hillary



Pat Dutrow and Bill Lowrey

PBB gutbucket player Mary Horne and PBB President Chris Bracher gave their tributes. Both Mary and Chris were members of the Junior Band. (Chris was also sound engineer for the festivities.)



Old friend, former member and Honorary Member Kevin McCabe was there with his wonderful plectrum renditions.



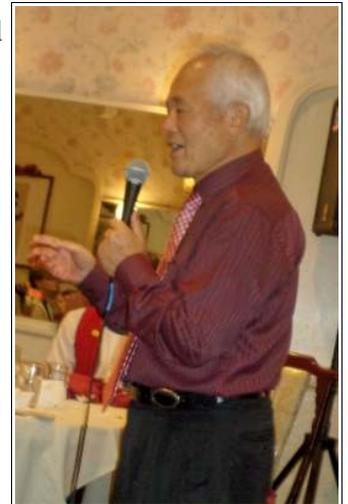
Later, Kevin and Charlie joined in duet.



Charlie's son Leon joined Bill, Chris and Kevin in a terrific foursome that played a fast and furious *Nola*. They ended up with *The World Is Waiting For the Sunrise*.



After the spoken and musical tributes, Bill Lowrey presented Charlie with an honorarium and Joanie presented a gift of contributions from band members.



Charlie expressed his thanks and, as all banjo bands must, the PBB and friends jammed.

Tributes from some of Charlie's Many Friends

FROM JIMMIE MIN

I joined the PBB around April of '65 and have seen and played with many of the former members who are not with us. So many memories and payouts. I cannot remember all their names but I can tell you stories about many of them that Charlie can attest to.

This one is from Cliff Tranberg's dad Ole. Ole got in some kind of accident where the fingers on his left hand were shortened. Ole comes to me said, "Jimmie look at my fingers. I've been playing banjo for over 50 years and look, it wore my fingers down." Same old Ole. Another time, he fell off the stage with his banjo flying in the air. It hit the floor and broke his Bakelite resonator in pieces. He didn't mind the hurt when he fell off the stage but was more concerned about the beautiful design that I painted on the back of the resonator.

About the famous Uncle Lenny Speth. He and I would always play *I Love You*. While we're playing, him with his corn cob pipe in his mouth, he'd flip his banjo around for on the back there were nude pictures. The senior ladies right in front of us would scream their heads off.

I first start playing the uke but when I first heard the banjo playing by Eddie Peabody I told myself that's the sound I like so, it has been the banjo ever since. I was 11 then.

To Charlie a very "HAPPY 80th BIRTHDAY!!!"

BILL LUNDGREN

I only wish that I had run into you at Scarlett LaRue's in the early 1980's when I moved to San Jose. I would have joined the PBB then and would have had many more years to develop my banjo playing skills under your watchful eye.

Thank you for the 12 great years of inspiration I have received from your skilled band leadership and from your extraordinary banjo talent.

MARY HORNE

Charlie, here's a picture of the Junior Band from May 1956. I received it from Steve Howard. We all gained so much from being in your band. Thank you.



First row: Connie Karkalik, Jim Aerosmith, Kevin Tierney, Donna Richards, Stephen Howard, Robert Mapes, Nori Tagawa.

Second row: Charlie Tagawa, Mickey Rose, Patsy Rose, Mike Foley, Janice Jolly, Steve Mapes, Joe Howard.

JOAN GOLDSTEIN

I am sad that Charlie's party is over but I'm happy to say that it was a great success. I know I had a wonderful time and I hope that the people who attended also had a wonderful time. I have a few people that I would like to thank for making the party such a wonderful success - first I would like to thank Tom and Janice and Eileen for helping me with the beautiful cupcake banjo display.

I want to thank Arlene Okerlund for a fabulous speech about Charlie – talking about his early days in Japan and his wonderful accomplishments later in life.

A big thank you to Bill Lowrey for putting on a wonderful entertainment display -better than most of the jubilees that I have attended. Thank you to Chris Bracher for setting up the sound system for our show and of course a big thank you to Jim Strickland for always doing such a fine job as master of ceremonies. I promise the band that when Charlie turns 100 I will put on another fabulous party like the one we had on October 24, 2015.

JIM STRICKLAND

Charlie, When I retired I knew nothing about the banjo except that I loved the sound that we had heard at the Red Garter in Chicago.

As a matter of fact, I knew almost nothing about music. You taught me both.

Well, I play banjo like an engineer not like a banjo player but all those hours of hours learning and playing have added so much to my life. Thank you.

PENINSULA BANJO BAND CHRISTMAS PARTY

Saturday December 19, 2015 5:00 - 9:00 PM

Mariani's Inn and Restaurant 2500 El Camino Real
Santa Clara, California 95051 Tel. 408-243-1431

Cocktails: 5:00 PM Dinner: 6:00 PM

Dinner Choices: 1) Pasta Primavera (Vegetarian dish) 2) Chicken Marsala,
3) Tri-tip – plus dessert

Christmas party is for all playing members and Auxiliary.

Guests are welcome - \$40.00 per person.

Betty Jean will be around to take your orders and collect money if you are bringing guests. If you do not come on Wednesday evenings - phone or email Betty Jean with your dinner selection.

Please also send a check to Betty if you are bringing a guest.

RSVP to Betty Jean by Monday, December 7, 2015

Mariani's food and atmosphere are wonderful.

Come and enjoy a wonderful evening.

