

Happy Holidays from Flamenco Romántico 2020

What a strange year 2020 has been for so many of us. My Dad died at 100 years old on January 12. Freddie and I, my sister Elaine and her husband Ken, Peggy (my Dad's wife) and her daughter Cammy were all with him when he died. It was a sacred and extremely peaceful death. Still



Elun at family memorial dinner next to head of my father.

grieving, my sister and I are getting used to being the oldest generation. My Dad's memorial was held at Cabrillo College in February, just before COVID hit. We were fortunate enough to see much of our family then, including my son Elun and granddaughter Josie (now 14), and to be able to mourn together. Unfortunately, Donna, Elun's wife, got the flu and couldn't travel at the last minute.

My Dad did not get to see our beautiful bathroom and my extravagant closet all finished, but this project did get finished shortly after he died. As I grieved his loss, I stopped editing of my second book, and couldn't work on it for months. In reflection, I am happy that in the years before my Dad's death, I visited him weekly and called him daily. I used to read excerpts of my books to him and to Peggy. Dad and I would often sit out



At my Dad's house on eve of his memorial



Freddie & Josie after the memorial.

in the sun quietly, near the end. We both loved the sun. I found that no matter how prepared you are or how much you appreciate a long life, you are never ready for the death of a loved one. I still miss him as I count the blessings of the long and good life he lived.

Rabbi Paula at Temple Beth El gave me a wonderful book on mourning with spaces for journal entries which I filled out daily for the



Altar to my Dad

almost year-long time prescribed. It helped. She also spoke at my Dad's memorial. I appreciate my Jewish roots and culture.

Then COVID hit and changed our lives even more. We stopped seeing friends, going out, and doing anything unnecessary that involved leaving our property. I stopped teaching my 3 Flamenco dance classes and switched my psychotherapy clients to video. My shamanic journey circle has moved online as well, and one member has been taking an active role leading it when I am too overwhelmed to do it.

By early summer, I finally resumed editing my second book, *Turquoise Interlude*, a memoir about my time spent in Taos, New Mexico area 1968-1970. Fortunately, in those days I had kept a journal or it wouldn't have been possible to remember in so much detail. The story is told from who I am now looking back at the girl in her twenties during that incredible time period.

In May, our good friend Cihltli needed a place with a dance studio and internet to take an intensive Masters in Dance program that had been switched to online because of COVID. After extensive quarantining and a negative COVID test, she drove up here and moved into our Sunset Room. She used both the small and big studios until we finally, with the help of our neighbor Jim, got decent internet to the big studio. Cihltli was such an important emotional support, and the joy of having a close friend nearby was a precious gift to both Freddie and me. An amazing Flamenco dancer and teacher, Cihltli taught online classes from our dance studios. Using her expert cleaning and organization skills, she also helped us clean and declutter the dance studio, yurt and our front porch.

Cihltli stayed until October and then went home to help her husband Ethan pack and move to a new and nicer apartment. Luckily Ethan was able to visit us when Cihltli was here, also quarantining first and receiving a negative COVID test. He brought their adorable dog Tama up, who then spent some time here with Cihltli while Ethan worked on his Ph.D. program and returned to Los Angeles. They were both a breath of fresh air. We wish they could have stayed!

In early summer the weather was exquisite and I swam almost every day. Our neighbor Janet,



(Jim's wife – they live just on the other side of our pool house) swam with me most days and occasionally both Jim and Cihltli (although not together) joined us. It was nice to have company and to have developed a safe pod.

Then the hot, dry swimming weather was interrupted by a dramatic lightning storm and the Northern California fires started. Smoke and ash were everywhere and we ended up evacuating for three nights, although we came back during the days. Ethan's parents, Sally and Ken, who live on the west side of Santa Cruz, were nice enough to host us. They had a self-contained studio for us and Cihltli stayed in their self-contained guest room. That first night as we drove to their house, we could barely see through the smoke, which was worse there. But the thought of having to escape from our home at night down our one-lane road, made us keep going.

Freddie stored all his guitars and tapes at our friend Julio's house, which is farther south and near the beach, so it was safe during the fires. I regretted selling my Dad's house so quickly (joint decision with sister Elaine and step-brother Nicky) because it had always been my escape safe place if needed. But that is now in the past.

In June we quietly celebrated Freddie's 81st birthday and our 20th wedding anniversary. Ethan was here by then and he cooked us an incredible brunch in the dance studio. I am so



glad that we had the 2-day party last year for Freddie's 80th!

Then, in August, Freddie had a colonoscopy to investigate the blood in his stool and discovered that he had a large mass of colorectal cancer. I stopped writing again and concentrated on dealing with this new crisis. The threat of the fires receded in light of the cancer.

During October, I turned 76 in the most uneventful birthday of my life. The important event was, after multiple tests, Freddie finally had the colorectal mass removed, but in addition to the large tumor, one of the 27 lymph nodes harvested had cancer. After eight days in the hospital and a short recovery at home, Freddie decided to try alternative cancer treatments in Mexico. Cihltli returned to Los Angeles and we went to the CHIPSA cancer hospital in Tijuana, flying to San Diego. What a shock to suddenly be out in public.



Pre-surgery



At CHIPSA hospital

All the staff at the hospital, from doctors, nurses, drivers, cleaners, etc. were welcoming and compassionate. We started as outpatient, living in a condo by the ocean, but due to Freddie's falls at night, we moved to inpatient. Their focus was a modified Gerson anti-cancer diet and many immune building therapies. During our time there, I saw clients by video in our condo and even took a 3-day intensive online Brainspotting course. My time there was not relaxing and I never once picked up my book to work on it.

When we returned home in November, after 23 days in Tijuana, we consulted with a UCSF colorectal cancer specialist and her team (video appointment). They recommended six treatments of single chemo because of the one cancerous lymph node, which could travel through Freddie's body and metastasize anywhere. In a telephone consult with Freddie's CHIPSA doctor, she explained it more fully and agreed with the recommendation.

On December 4, Freddie had another colonoscopy to biopsy the other mass in his ascending colon. The result was negative although the doctor said it looked cancerous. Perhaps this means that the Tijuana CHIPSA treatments helped. December 9, Freddie had a port installed in his chest and began the chemo the next day. On December 15 we have a video appointment with a renowned cancer specialist acupuncturist for herbs and treatments to reduce the chemo effects. So Freddie's cancer journey does not end with

this holiday letter. Fortunately, we have finally found someone to cook the modified Gerson protocol diet most days, so that helps and her food is delicious.

On a sad but interesting note, Freddie's old friend (from the 60's) guitarist Ron Chinn died of cancer. Three other dear friends also developed cancer this year, Omar, Nina and Ron G. Friend Marc S had a relapse, but all are doing well. Another guitarist friend also developed colorectal cancer.

In spite of everything, Freddie's spirits are surprisingly good. He has continued to digitize his video and audio recordings and is again working on repairing and finishing the guitars hanging all over his workshop. Our friend Julio, a former dance student of mine, has apprenticed to Freddie (they always wear their masks). Freddie is also giving him guitar lessons, which makes me very happy. I so love hearing the live music and that Freddie is passing on his incredible knowledge. He truly knows how to live mindfully in the present. I am fighting my exhaustion and trying to walk and rest.

In the cocoon of our home, Freddie and I luxuriate in taking showers in our walk-in, Spanish-tiled bathroom. My closet is a dream and now I always easily hang up all my clothes each night. When Freddie received his cancer diagnosis, we postponed our upcoming kitchen remodel. I think about what I want and hope to find a good designer and then do it, now that we have help cooking and keeping us on this complicated cancer diet.

My sister Elaine calls me every day since Freddie's cancer diagnosis has upended our lives. She is a wonderful support. She and her husband Ken spent Thanksgiving with us after the four of us got COVID tests first. Even so, we ate outside on our deck in the cold sunshine. My father's ashes and Freddie's mother's ashes still sit on their altars in our living room, waiting for COVID to end and gatherings to begin.

We haven't seen Freddie's sister Dorothy, his brother Timmie and wife Joanie, or his son Manolo since COVID began. Neither have we seen Freddie's daughter Maggie and family or his step-daughter Jessamy this year, but they are well.



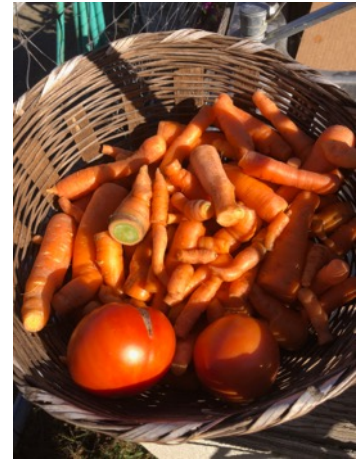
Our new walk-in shower with its Spanish tile.

Nick and Michelle still live in the cottage and are both working for the Five Branches Chinese Medicine school. I no longer get acupuncture and Tuina massage from Nick due to COVID but I still use the facial rejuvenation oil that Michelle makes. Martina still lives here in her “tiny house,” and Deborah still lives in our loft. We social distance and don’t see each other often, even in passing.



Martin on the tractor

Our garden still gives us healthy sustenance. Fresh food from our earth is such a tasty gift.



We are grateful to have Martin in our lives. He is part of our COVID pod and he still keeps our paradise functioning and flowing –his creativity is coupled with skill, competence, and love.

We also feel very grateful for all our wonderful friends who have sent messages of love and support and offers of help during this time of extra trial.

Please see my blog: www.MariannaMejia.com for excerpts of my writing. Anyone who wants to read a PDF version of *When the Moon Dances*, is welcome to request it from me.

Freddie and I hope all of you are doing well. We send Gratitude and Love and wish you much Peace, Happiness and Beauty in this coming year. We value being alive and that beauty and love surround us. Happy Solstice, Happy Holidays.

Love,
Freddie and Marianna Mejia



Wolf who came from my Dad's house



*Family holiday card with my Dad,
Elaine & Marianna*



Sculpture from my Dad's house now at ours



Sculpture from my Dad's house now at ours

Views of Paraíso

