



On Freddie's 84th birthday & our 23rd wedding anniversary

Happy Holidays from Flamenco Romántico 2023

Our letter this year is long, because so much has happened in this post-pandemic time. Unfortunately, our biggest news is that in February, Freddie's colon cancer returned, metastasized to his lungs. We are still exploring treatment options, and consulting with a doctor from UCSF as well as our local oncologist. Freddie does not want chemo injections or a port, but he has cleaned up his diet again. At this point he is not in any pain from the cancer. CT and PET scans

indicate it is growing slowly. The December CT scan result still showed "no significant change" of the tumor, which remains at 1.6 cm.

My medical event: For years I thought I had painful sciatica in my left leg. It continued to grow worse. Even regenerative medicine and physical therapy didn't help much. One day in March my sister suggested I get a hip x-ray because sometimes arthritis presents as muscle pain. She was right –they found severe bone-on bone arthritis. In April, I had a total hip replacement. It has taken the pain out of my dancing and the limp out of my walk. I am so impressed! What a difference that surgery has made in my life. The months of physical therapy and doctor's appointments have been worth it. The replacement should last the rest of my lifetime.

As we age and die, seeing loved ones becomes more precious, reaffirming long friendships as well as newer ones. And continuing the theme, this year many friends



Freddie, Lakshmi, Valentina, Marianna

have come to visit. One never knows if it will be the last time we see each other. We value each moment with our family and friends. Since the beginning of Covid, 2023 has definitely been our most social year, as we realize our mortality in more profound ways.

In April, before my surgery, relatively young friends Lakshmi (whom we have known since 2003), Joe, & their toddler Valentina visited from San Diego. Valentina is a month younger than Archer, Nick and Michelle's baby, and the two met. And we met Valentina.

In June, old friend Marcellus, recently widowed, came from Arizona for Freddie's 84th birthday and our 23rd



Marcellus



Freddie & Mano

anniversary party. At the party we made music, danced, ate, and laughed, once again cherishing our wonderful guests.

After our party in June, Freddie's son Mano and his wife Alta visited from Las Vegas. Mano visited again when he returned for his mother's memorial. He is still dealing with medical issues.

In early July, my son Elun, his wife Donna, and our 17-

year-old granddaughter Josie came from upstate New York. Cihltli, Ethan (from LA) and Cihltli's mother Elisenda (from Mexico) stopped in for a day, and Cihltli and Ethan both visited separately during the year. In early August, friends Ryan, Melissa & their boys came from Texas. The day they left, old friends Nina and Mica came down from the Bay area for a few days for a much-needed visit.



Josie, Marianna, Elun & Donna at the Winchester House



Freddie & Dave

In mid-August, old friend (we have a lot) Dave Borson and daughter Molly drove from Mendocino for Charlie Sutton's memorial and to visit us for a few days. Due to aging situations, who knows if we will see each other again!

More visiting old friends included Debra Walker (SF), Omar, and Freddie's ex-wife Kathy (Bay area).



Dorothy, Freddie, Nina, Marianna, Mica

In September, a Flamenco kitchen designer from southern California, Helena, visited and helped draw up plans for our new kitchen, which Alex (our master builder) will remodel at the beginning of next year, when all the safety projects are finished. Later in September, Flamenco guitarist David Guthartz, visited from the Bay area. Cousin Tamara and family visited in November. And throughout the year, Freddie's

sister Dorothy's daughter and grandsons have also made a number of visits. We feel loved.

We hosted another heart-warming party for my 79th birthday in October. Freddie's brother Timmie and his wife Joanie visited from Point Arena. My sister Elaine and husband Ken were there from Palo Alto and many friends from different areas. Some stayed home because they had or were just exposed to Covid.

So far, Freddie's health appears good. With each event we plan, we are never sure of what unexpected event might derail it, so each gathering of friends and family remains a blessing.



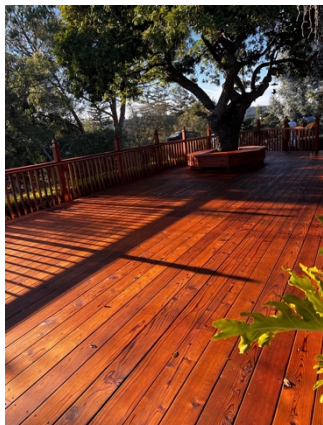
Alex

Still very concerned by the prospect of fires brought on by climate change, we continue to be proactive. Alex and his helper Arturo are diligently working to fireproof and add safety to our property. All our buildings are now encased in Hardy Board (concrete wood). Alex has finished rebuilding the loft stairs, sunset room stairs, lower



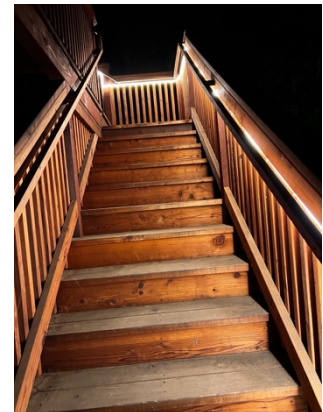
Arturo

wellhouse stairs, and two sets of deck stairs! He rebuilt the entire front deck of our house, eliminating the many trip hazards that awaited us. Next, he installed subtle outdoor lighting and electrical outlets. The loft porch too has been expanded and lighting added. New lights and outlets were also added inside the loft, inspired by the upcoming visit last August of Ryan, Melissa and boys. In the Sunset room and in Dorothy's room, wooden floors have replaced the concrete.



Our new front deck

Those rooms and both dance studios have been repainted inside. Failing windows have been replaced. The rest of the buildings and our well are now encased with concrete board. Two gates have been fireproofed, and there is more to go, like fireproofing the new water tanks. I thank my father every day for leaving us the money necessary to do all this long-delayed maintenance. There was so much more rot and decay than we



Loft stairs at night

had imagined. And we feel grateful to have Alex and Arturo cheerfully doing such beautiful, detailed, and exacting work.

Again, this year, we've had a lot of plant and tree work done, limbing and cutting off dead wood, clearing brush, and removing purple and green vines that were too close to the house. We hired a well company to install two new water tanks and update our lower well plumbing, which now services our whole property. Our upper well is dry.

Deaths – In December, my Dad's 93-year-old widow, Peggy, died. Her daughter and son were by her side. Fewer friends have died this year. But Charlie Sutton, old friend, Flamenco singer and luthier, died in his 90's. In November, legendary Flamenco dancer and teacher Angelita Vargas died in Sevilla. She was a mentor and a wonderful person and will be missed. I was in Spain, studying with her, when she had her first stroke. The death that shocked us the most this year was that of our dear and vital friend Marcellus. Two days after Thanksgiving, Marcellus died suddenly. We are so glad we got to see him last June. One never knows when the last time will be ...

Other deaths affecting us are the mass, unnecessary deaths of people in warring countries. The violence and the suffering in the world weighs on us.

But our blessings counterbalance. We are surrounded by love. We are grateful for the beauty around us and the loving support of the beautiful people who work for us, and who have become our friends. We are equally grateful to our friends and family who have come to visit us this year, both from far away and also locally.

Perhaps that is partly why, this year, the continuing deaths have not pushed me in my writing the way they did last year. Since my hip surgery, I have spent less time writing. Before the surgery, I finished my book about meeting Freddie, "Call to My Soul –Dancing the Path to True Love," and after having it beta-read, found an editor who is helping me make it read more like a novel. In this stage, I am creating scenes and my writing is stretching and growing. I have moved the first three chapters to other places in the memoir. Suddenly the book is no longer in the readable form that it had been before. I am unsure of how it is really starting, what will grab my readers, if the first chapter only grabbed me and my friends, but not unknown others. My book is back in construction. I get



Freddie in his music room.

frustrated and discouraged, but I know that my writing is leaping forward. I like the results, although the process makes me struggle. The work is hard, and I go slowly, the urgency not so urgent.



Dorothy and Marianna writing

movies together almost every night in Freddie's music room. I get tired and go to bed early. Freddie is still repairing instruments, as well as digitizing his music and copying our old videos with Jennifer's help. Jennifer also drives him to most of his medical appointments. For a while, Freddie tried physical therapy for his shoulders and as stroke recovery, but when he began Feldenkrais work, he quit the physical therapy. Feldenkrais is gentle and seems to help him move more easily.

Dorothy (Freddie's big sister) and I often get together on Sundays to write, although not as consistently as in 2022. Again, as I have last year and the years before, I post monthly on my blog. See excerpts from my book on: www.MariannaMejia.com.

Dorothy and Freddie watch



Freddie working on Omar's Oud

Jennifer, whom Mica renamed "Gemafer," due to her gem-like character, is still



Jennifer taking a class with Freddie.

Freddie's caregiver. Already a talented base player (she plays for the Mermen band), Jennifer continues taking Flamenco guitar lessons with Freddie five days a week. She is progressing beautifully under Freddie's strict and persistent instruction. Freddie, as he has always been, is still an inspiring teacher. Again, this year, Freddie has played cajon and I have danced with the Mermen in selected numbers.

Freddie has also been playing cajon for my dance classes on Saturdays and Mondays. In July, my students requested the second class, on Monday. I obliged and am enjoying and feel energized by

it. Kiel usually plays guitar for my classes and often we have Cristo singing. We are very lucky. Jennifer also joins us on most Saturdays, playing cajon with Freddie. My students love the added support in the rhythm and Freddie's keen eye in helpfully critiquing their dancing. I love and cherish working with Freddie in Flamenco again. He excites me. I also often teach a private class in the middle of the week, but that one has no live music.



Marianna, and Jennifer performing with the Mermen Band in Santa Cruz

As I age, I seem to need more than one form of exercise. This year has again been a swimming year for me. Until mid-November, I was swimming almost every day once the weather warmed after my hip surgery and initial recovery. I often swim with my neighbor Janet, our light wetsuits extending our swimming season. When alone, I play an audio book –through a waterproof speaker, and sometimes swim longer than I planned. Cold, fog and rain have now stopped my swimming for the year.

Our population here at Paraiso is stable. Martina is still living in her tiny house. Dorothy lives in her beautiful room, using the remodeled bathroom, the newly lighted kitchen, and the breezeway with the flagstone floor and concrete board sides. Nick and Michelle are still in the cabin which will be remodeled sometime after our kitchen. Archer, Nick and Michelle's almost two-year old, runs around and enchants us. We watched Archer learn to crawl and to walk and start to talk.



Michelle, Nick, Archer, Freddie

Michelle has been taking my Flamenco classes again, bringing Archer with her. He intently watches part of the class, until Nick picks him up or Dorothy comes in and takes him for a walk. We all love him and take joy at having this new generation growing right here. Sometimes, at the end of my Bulerías class, Nick will come in and dance carrying Archer in his arms. Once he set Archer's feet on the floor and moved him like a puppet, to the music. Archer loved it. Nick also comes over when Freddie falls, and lifts him up for us. Freddie is not falling often now, but when he does, it is scary.

Freddie again grew pot plants in the enclosure under our grape arbor, near the loft. He grew less than last year and trimmed them mostly by himself. Freddie's concentration is still as focused as always when he has something that holds his interest.



Freddie in his pot garden

I feel energized teaching my two group Flamenco dance classes again, along with private classes.

I continue my shamanic journey practice and leading our monthly circles, now both in person and online, as well as my fully online psychotherapy practice.



Marianna teaching a class on Halloween

Our loving helpers –Brian and Rebecca caringly cook us nourishing, gourmet meals and make the healing juices. Jennifer, by caring for Freddie, is also helping me too, in many ways. We give thanks again.

Martin continues to keep the garden flourishing and the property maintained. He has been with us so long that he is family. We are grateful to have such a loving team of people helping in our lives.

My sister Elaine still calls me nearly every day. I value her wonderful support. She and husband Ken are doing well and traveling a lot.

Josie, my 17-year old granddaughter, was accepted to SUNY Canton for college and hopes to play volleyball for them next year. She and I often Facetime. I talk to Elun weekly. He is enjoying his sabbatical. Donna has a full teaching schedule.



Marianna (after hip surgery), Martin, & Freddie

We visit online with part of Freddie's family in our weekly video meetings, which keep the connections strong.

We haven't seen Freddie's daughter Maggie and family but we have talked to Maggie on Facetime and phone.

As it has for years, our garden gives us healthy vegetables and some fruit. Lettuce for our green drinks, tomatoes, potatoes, parsley and kale, Poblano and green peppers, carrots and beets, watercress, basil, green beans, corn, apples, oranges, and strawberries have nourished us, grown here on our land. And it all tastes so good! Thankfulness and appreciation for the fresh food from our earth is celebrated by my rattle at every meal.



Sunset and ocean from our new deck.

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.

We remember that death, like winter, is a part of the cycle of life and rebirth. As the elders die and the plants in the cold earth wither away in winter, children are born and the sun starts to warm, again and again. We might just not be here to see it forever. But we feel grateful to be here and see it all now.

Happy Solstice, Happy Holidays.

Love, Freddie and Marianna Mejia



Marianna and Freddie between the house and the garden.



Our new deck with the rebuilt tree bench.



Looking toward the sunset past the pool and dance studio.



Deer entertain us.



Our swimming pool with ocean view.



Freddie & Marcellus at Costco on wheels – two elegant old men who don't act old!

RIP Marcellus 11/23. May you be laughing and playing music forever in the world beyond.



Marianna dancing to the Mermen. Jennifer on bass. Blessings to the ocean.



Sunset from our deck, the tree and the yurt.



Juan del Gator, Ricardo Díaz, Freddie, and Marianna at Juan's Fiesta in August. Ole Flamenco Gitano.



Michelle holding Archer and dancing in class.