

## From Promise to Profound to Punchline We Survived 2020!

*If you're reading this, we presume you did, too. Congratulations!*



*And are hopeful for 2021...*

The year started with great promise and excitement as to what lay ahead: Big plans, adventure, travel, road trips, reunite with friends and colleagues, keep an eye out for the right opportunities, who knows what else?

It ended as a punchline to explain some weird, crazy or horrible thing every day. "Hey, what happened to you?" "2020! What did you expect?" We had to replace our water heater and one of our computers, but 9.5 months of shelter-in-place; that one came as a surprise.

We are fortunate to have a home and each other, enough food, toilet paper and means to get by. And, absent all the social pressure /work obligations that usually keep us on the go, we've had ample time to get a few things done, reflect on life and feel gratitude for all the blessings we still have.

The first couple months of 2020 were pretty normal. Chris was hand-watering worm tea on our landscape plants, around the giant oaks and in remote hillside areas, where he was trying to start some native plants. The winter was dry, plus it's good, mindful exercise.

He made a few court appearances as expert witness and spoke on hemp nutrition at the Sustainable Foods Expo. We went to the Women's March, International Cannabis Business Conference (our last time in San Francisco!) and Oaksterdam U graduation. We went to the athletic club, hosted Donna and Andrew from Vancouver Canada and Marci and Tom from Portland. We dined with Mikki's Florida cousins, Stu and Chara when they were in the area. We drove to Redding for Steve's 'Rocking Birthday Band Reunion' and hiked in the mountain snow with Adam and Eris. We celebrated our great niece, Sierra's, first birthday.

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By February came word of a 'novel' virus in Asia that crossed over from animals to humans. So we took jokingly exaggerated precautions: We stood farther from people ("Get back! Ha, ha!"), stopped hugging friends, bowed or bumped elbows instead of shaking hands, no blowing out birthday candles. We practiced standard safe-smoking at our early March in-person Cannamaste ceremony, where we shared the sacramental spliff with our Cantheist group. Chris flew to Palm Springs to present at a California Hemp Workshop. Mikki spoke at a Rotary Club luncheon on the problem of illegal dumping (her new passion). Covid-19 seemed a threat that lay an ocean away.

### The Portland 'Memorial' Reunion

We flew to Portland and stayed with Marci and Tom, before uniting nearby at a beautiful Airbnb with Conrads from California, Thailand, Georgia, New York and the Columbia River basin to celebrate the life of Chris' mom, Betty, and "Memorialize" her. The whole sibling crew was there: Bob, Rose, Ruth, we two, Missy, Michele and Tom, Fred and Anthony. Bob brought Lucky and Nova. His son, Rod, and wife Sui came in from Thailand. Ruth's son Lou came by with his fiancé, Stevie and kids. Missy's sons, Adam and Dan, dropped by. We cooked, ate, played Mom's favorite music and eulogized her, with a lovely call-in blessing from her brother, Uncle Henry. That was, sadly, the last time we spoke. Henry passed unexpectedly just a few months later.



We talked, walked in the frigid cold, jigsawed puzzles, played guitar, sang songs, played hide and seek, tried to keep up with the kids running around and ... ate!

### The Quarantine Begins ... and Settles in

Amid growing concern, we cut our trip short as new travel restrictions went into effect. Chris brought some of Mom's ashes home to spread under our oak trees. We scrambled back to El Sobrante and came home on the very first day of California's 'stay at home' order.

Buckle in for a month in isolation they said: Two weeks for one full virus cycle to pass, plus two weeks for spillover. A good opportunity to just be home and take time



to tackle projects that we always put off for another day. The first week, we just took it easy. We couldn't go to our athletic club, so we read books, watched TV and slept in. When two of our nephews got Covid-19, it got real for us early-on. Fortunately, they recovered and seem fine. By then, we were afraid even to go to markets and ate less to make the supplies last longer. As time dragged on, that got old fast and we worked out an arrangement with our neighbor, Maggie, to take turns shopping for each other and thus avoid having to go too often. (Nowadays, Mikki feels safer at the markets, as we all wear masks and shoppers are limited.)

Again, we made big plans, like journaling and writing memoirs. But a week or so in, we panicked. This thing is going to end soon, so we better tackle some projects we've been putting off. Suddenly, we had no time for anything anymore. We plunged into cleaning and organizing closets, drawers and garage, going through old paperwork, recycling files and tossing stuff. Mikki cataloged our drug library, hoping to find it a new home. The lockdown was extended once, and again. We piled stuff in the garage to donate, but thrift stores are all closed, so the piles stayed. Bit by bit some projects slowed down or got back burnered again, others amped up into a different form. We kept busy but weren't sure what we were doing or even what day it was. And that fresh glow you get from spring cleaning the house top to bottom? It faded as we realized that we have to do it again in summer, fall and winter since we're home all the time trapped in a mass of unfinished projects.

Mikki got more addicted to screens, keeping up with developments, election news and protests against racial injustice, looking for signs that America would reject the scourge of Trumpism. Chris rebuilt the irrigation system, dug new garden beds and spent a lot of time in the riparian zone, planting, moving and tending plants, terracing the canyon and making trails down to the creek. He made memes for Facebook pages, wrote and managed content for TheLeafOnline.com.

At least the lockdown unleashed a lot of creativity in

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the world, shedding light on funny and creative videos and memes to take the edge off. We saw more wildlife than ever hanging around our place: Deer, a coyote, ducks, egrets, lizards, squirrels ... even two otters!

In the midst of all this, Covid forced the Oaksterdam Museum to shut down and packed up. Chris had to pick up and stow all the artifacts back into the garage.

### Zooming into a Virtual Video Meet Up Land

Too bad we didn't invest in Zoom, which became a hub to stay engaged with others online. Mikki soon got into hosting online meetings and gatherings. She organized a Norris Family Reunion with cousins from all over the country, some of whom we'd never met before, and a reunion of the Alliance of Reform Organizations (ARO), our old drug policy reform colleagues who haven't met in person for years, and taught a couple of online Advocacy classes for Oaksterdam U.

There were so many heartfelt moments online this year. We hosted Cannamaste ceremonies and get-togethers with friends and family for special occasions or just to check in on how we're all doing. Likewise, we attended and participated in some amazing virtual events: Earthdance, Rainbow Gatherings, conferences, meetings, town halls, El Sobrante Municipal Advisory Council meetings, podcasts and streaming Internet radio.

So many life passages happened virtually, some that we would never be able to attend in person. Adam put together two great birthday zooms (Shelley's and Mikki's and his joint bash) complete with games, polls, slideshows and tributes. We attended Lauren and Sam's

beautiful wedding, two brides, activist Kevin Zeese's memorial, a touching 10-year anniversary *Yahrzeit* for Mikki's mom, Bernice. In some ways, relationships deepened as we can be together so easily, without the need to pack and travel.

## Keeping Up With Our Selves

We use the vibration platform and try to stay healthy and active and get good exercise, despite not being able to go to our beloved Lakeridge Athletic Club. Mikki rides a recumbent stationary bike for a good hour per day, watching *The View* and checking emails or the news. Chris jogs on a mini-trampoline while playing guitar and works around outside, tracking lots of steps.

We gave away our hot tub, got a pressure washer and rebuilt and refinished our upper deck, making a space to enjoy meals outside, shaded by the smaller oak tree and curling wisteria vine. Occasionally, we venture out to walk the neighborhood or take socially-distant hikes with one or two friends on nearby trails. We feel blessed to have nature's beauty in our yard and places nearby, and hope you have access to it, too.

We are so grateful for Patti's Zoom Pilates classes a few days a week and Wendy's yoga. Mikki, Marci and Janet took Wendy's Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction course. It was great to share it with long-time friends — and helpful in coping with the stressful period before the election. It offers a kind of group therapy and practices to address old, lingering personal issues through meditation, introspection and inspirational readings. Mikki highly recommends MBSR if you want more presence and ease in life, and the book, *Radical Acceptance* by Tara Brach, for the inner-critics out there.

## An Eruption for Social Justice

We were glad to see that people of all ages and backgrounds took to the streets around the world to protest the killing of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and too many others to mention, and to proclaim that "Black Lives Matter." It's a shame that criminals and some police took advantage of the crisis to commit violence.

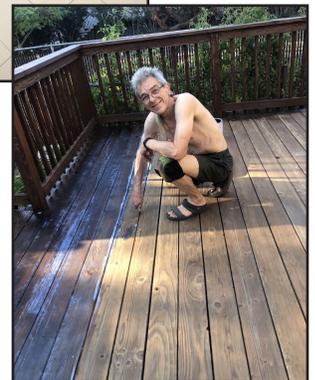
It felt odd, but we two hardcore activists held back from the protests for racial and social justice this summer, given our ages and the pandemic, other than one caravan protest. Instead, we kept engaged by donating and writing lots of postcards to voters in Iowa, North Carolina, Wisconsin and Georgia. And voting, of course.

We wrote and called office holders to support changes we want to see. We were so relieved when Biden and Harris won. They weren't our first choice, but Joe rose

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Mt. Shasta with Adam and Eris in January; Mikki busy scrubbing the bathroom; Chris refinishing the deck.



to the occasion, won the election and we are more impressed with him every day. We don't expect miracles but are hopeful that this diverse administration can start to repair the gross inequities in our society, and harm to the environment, institutions and democracy.

We are also doing our part to keep our little stretch of road free of litter, and joined a group on Next Door to do more of it in conjunction with the illegal dumping committee Mikki formed last year. She regularly reports dumps to county public works and is looking forward to working with others to find solutions to this problem. It is really gratifying to get rid of these eyesores by picking up litter, making our neighborhoods cleaner and more beautiful in just a few hours time.

## Guilty Entertainment Pleasures

On the lighter side, we did watch a lot of TV and programming we otherwise never would have. Thank goodness for Stephen Colbert, Trevor Noah and Seth Meyers, who gave us a nightly outlet for our political anxieties, to laugh at the madness going on. TV series we enjoyed include *Schitt's Creek*, *Cuckoo*, *Dead to Me*, *Fargo*, *100 Humans*, *Upload*, *The Vote*, *Hollywood*, *Ted Lasso*, *Queen's Gambit* and *the Morning Show*. Mikki experienced other cultures and countries through Netflix with *Shtisel* and *Unorthodox* (about Hasidic Jews), *Indian Matchmaking*, and *Never Have I Ever*. Movies we recommend are *The Social Dilemma* (helps you cut



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he will be out of office and no longer be the center of media attention. The virus will be in the rearview mirror and trees will grow back. Seeds sprout. Life goes on.

### Adapting to Changing Times

A handful of Chris' hillside transplants survived the summer, and he's back at it, trying again this winter. His efforts in the garden paid off when we were able to harvest and enjoy a bounty of chard, tomatoes and cannabis. Speaking of cannabis, we are happy that four more states legalized it for adult use (now 15 states), and even Mississippi legalized it for medical purposes. The UN changed its policy to allow medical use. The House voted to legalize. Cannabis businesses were deemed "essential" to the health and well-being of many states and kept open. This is incredible vindication for our decades of hard work.

While 2020 was a challenge, we made it through relatively unscathed and wish for better days ahead with the coming vaccines and a competent new administration. Meanwhile, we wear face masks and try to stay healthy and not to spread any germs. We see the goodness and beauty of the world and count our blessings every day. Our hearts ache for those who have lost so much and are still struggling today. We also need to express our deepest gratitude to all the essential workers out there who persist to take care of all of us and keep things going, at great personal risk. Thanks to all!

As we enter 2021, we are thinking of you and hope that you're hanging in there and doing well. Please be in touch if you'd like to get together for a virtual visit sometime. Hopefully, we will get to see many of our good friends in person over the next year, as well.

So, lots of love and best wishes for a happy, healthy, and much better 2021!

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down on Facebook), 13<sup>th</sup> and Just Mercy (racial injustice), Trial of the Chicago 7, and the hilarious (and not for the easily offended) Borat Subsequent Movie Film. We especially enjoyed amazing nature shows like Planet Earth: A Celebration, My Octopus Teacher, Tiny World (Apple+), to remind us there is an awesome world beyond our human-focused one which needs protection.

We likewise try to be good stewards of the land and are hopeful that a Biden - Harris administration will take climate change seriously and try to ward off the destruction of wildfires, drought, hurricanes and extreme weather. Climate change is real and we are paying the price for ignoring it! It's already too late for some things. We were out of the fire zones but vast tracts of California and other states were devastated. Our air quality was horrible – so bad we had to stay inside for weeks during typically "good" weather months to reduce breathing the pervasive, smoke-filled air. One day was so dark and orange, we had to keep the lights on all day and were forced to get an air purifier for inside the house. California has been in drought for seven of the last nine years, and the soil has little moisture stored. We have a "go bag" of vital documents set aside to grab if we ever have to evacuate.

A fire did hit close to us one day. An apartment barbecue across the creek burst ablaze with roaring flames we could see through the trees. Chris got ready to hose things down from our side but, thanks to the quick response of firefighters, it didn't reach the greenery by the creek. We can't afford to lose any more trees, since we've already lost significant canopy to wind and rain and, when big limbs drop from a great height, they smash down all the branches and trees below them. As we write this, Trump is likewise reeking all the carnage he can on his way down and we are concerned about its impact on society in the years ahead. Nonetheless, we remain optimistic that we will soon turn the page,