

Thinking of you in '23!

Well, 2022 flew past, and we hope your year went well. Hard to believe it's already 2023 and time to check in with you and look back at what transpired with us. In El Sobrante, our ancient oak tree made a great recovery after losing several major limbs the year before and is sprouting new branches! One day we saw 10 turkey vultures sitting up in our oaks. A simple bath tub leak that started out as replacing a \$15-part blew up into a major repair – with holes in the ceiling and side of the tub and a whole new faucet – costing over 100 times that amount. Our neighbors sold their house but kept the open lot next door, so we still have a grassy view from the back. Chris built trails on the hillside and battled gophers in the garden. We enjoy the squirrels, deer, ducks, turtle, coyotes, hawks and assorted wildlife that visit. Now California is getting floods (not us) but we know it may still not end the drought. We will see.

A passion for picking up the local litter

Our commitment to a clean and beautiful El Sobrante drew us into personal forays to keep our neighborhood looking better and various local activities with members of our wonderful ES Green Team. The local library has hosted our monthly litter cleanup events and special events (MLK Day, Earth Day, Coastal Cleanup Day). We did periodic “adopt-a-road” cleanups at an entrance to town. Mikki chairs the Municipal Advisory Council Cleanup and Beautification Subcommittee (formerly, Illegal Dumping, a less enticing name). We are making a noticeable difference, which is gratifying.

We have to give a shout out to the Green Team members who are now also friends — Kenoli, who prints our signs (Chris does the design), Ken, Teri, Ramon, Ann Marie, Maggie, John, Ali, Tomas, Marsha, and our regular and occasional participants, including Allison, who played violin to entertain the volunteers. For people who don't get paid, they work really hard on this. Chris played a set



on his guitar for Earth Day. Dynamite Dave and the Detonators rocked the town for our September event.

A highlight of our year was the downtown El Sobrante Stroll. We had a booth decked out with signs about our efforts and how to dispose of old stuff without littering or illegal dumping and made a post card with disposal info and an invitation to our regular cleanups. We had a blast with a contingent in the parade, with cleanup chants, songs, people picking up litter, a precision-grabber drill team and big signs and banners. We wore plastic trash bags as it was pouring rain right before and after the march and also to make a point. Oddly, the march itself was dry but we wound up being soaked in rain, holding down our booth in a driving storm and refusing to let it rain on our parade, so to speak. We were recognized by the judges for our “Outstanding Spirit.” What fun!

Mikki was featured on County Supervisor Gioia's Facebook page and



website and we got an award from the Sobrante Hills Neighborhood Council (thanks, Ray and Louise!). We have two strong coalitions going, with SPAWNERS who help keep the creek riparian zone healthy and SOS! Richmond, who work with local unhoused persons to clean up areas around town. This is important, due to the link between urban encampments and the amount of trash that piles up around them.



The ever-changing world of cannabis advocacy

Chris still does cannabis expert witness work and won in a couple federal court cases, but things have slowed down. He gets a few odor and DUI cases, whether flowers are marijuana potency or non-psychoactive low-THC hemp, etc., and most tend to settle before trial.

More states passed legalization in 2022, for a total of 21 states plus DC that allow adult use (and sales)! More fun places to visit. Yay! We lobbied in Sacramento with CA-NORML in May, making progress for consumer rights despite the messy rollout of our state legal program. We're disappointed but not shocked that the US Senate again failed to pass meaningful cannabis reform. We were sad to lose some long-time friends and hempsters, including Steve Levine and Jeffrey Stonehill.

We were invited to Las Vegas in August to be interviewed onstage about our roles in organizing the cannabis hemp reform movement for a keynote presentation at *Cannabis Business Times'* annual Cannabis Conference.

In December, Amy Povah of CandoClemency.com (on the cover of our book, *Shattered Lives*, whom we helped get federal clemency from Pres. Clinton in 2000), Stephanie Landa of FreedomGrow.org, whose case Chris worked on, won the Emerald Cup Social Justice Activist Award. We were invited on stage with



other activists and given a shout out for being one of their inspirations! It was quite touching.

Sharing the entheogenic spirit of cannabis, etc.

We continued hosting online Cannamaste ceremonies but also did two in-person — one at Karen's Mendocino *Kind Bud Campout* in July and one at the *Emerald Cup* in December. Doing mindful body-scan meditations at big events with lots of noise and nearby activity is its own challenge. Jane Heaven set up a beautiful space for us at the Campout at the lovely, Black Oak Ranch where we went tubing on the river with her and Arya. Swami and Nikki sponsored a space at the Emerald Cup. Sadly, we lost another friend and fellow Cantheist and psychedelic-ecologist, Michael Gosney. He was our featured speaker at our March ceremony, where we heard about his inspiring life and work as a publisher and event organizer,



and his thoughts on cannabis and spirituality. His final interview is posted on our YouTube channel, *Cantheism Cannamaste Community*. We honor him, Steve, and Jeffrey with high honor.

In the fall, Chris drew on his seminarian background to talk about using ritual to enhance

cannabis spirituality and Mikki spoke to the spiritual benefits of our favorite plant at an entheogens conference in LA. It's nice to see the psychedelic legalization movement follow the route of cannabis via therapeutic use and religious freedom.

Island adventures and other tentative travels

The Las Vegas conference was our first foray out into such a large, crowded venue since the pandemic hit. Mikki took off her mask more than Chris, but we had the



same outcome and remain "Covid-19 virgins." We stayed at the Paris Hotel, across from the Belagio, watched the lighted and choreographed fountains, saw Cirque du Soleil's *Michael Jackson*, and visited Norris cousins, Craig,

Cathy and Isabella, as well as Mikki's old school mate Bonnie and husband, Mike.

As you probably don't recall, last year a planned trip to Hawaii for Jennifer's 50th birthday party didn't happen. Since the airfare was good only for a year from purchase, we visited her this year, instead. We extended that to a 3-week getaway / partial tax write-off, starting with a stay at Jen's comfy guest house in Makawao, Maui, with chickens, sheep and a jam session with Jen, Azure and Tim. We love the beaches and snorkeling at Napili and Kapalua. Hands-down, though, the highlight was our Road to Hana drive with Jen — waterfalls, stunning coastline and hiking through a giant Lava Tube.

We slept on a lanai at the Kauai Island cottage retreat of fellow longtime hempsters, Tanya and Rick, nestled amid the palms and sands of Hanalei Bay, with beautiful beaches in walking distance, amazing snorkeling, dazzling sunsets and historic botanical gardens. Snorkeling was all fun and games until Mikki got bit on her hand by the state fish, a *Humu Humu Nuku Nuku Apua'a*. Ouch!

On Big Island, we visited our hempster friend Lenda Hand at her hideaway, amid beautiful lava-rock shores, and wound our way to the Hilo side's Lava Tree Tropic Inn,



Two of Shelley and Jesse’s kids moved into new homes last year. Justine and Thomas got a place in Marin, so we helped paint the kitchen cabinets. Tesse and Eric Struve moved to Sebastopol with daughters Makena, Sierra, and this year’s new baby, Carina. We lined shelves, hung curtains, and Chris made a montage for the Struve girls with a magic forest, a lake, three each of mermaids, unicorns and castles, a rainbow and their mom and dad. It turned out to be pretty cute.



where we bonded with Irene the owner. We passed by raucous Guinea Fowl as we walked to the nearby Lava Tree State Monument in Pahoehoe, with its formations of lava-covered trees and impressive lava flows that still block a highway. We relaxed in nearby thermal pools, hiked at Volcanoes National Park and visited the spectacular Hawaii Tropical Bioreserve and Garden. We got to visit two more friends in the area, Bruce and Patty Sue, and wrapped up by going to a Kona-side timeshare for more sun and surf, visiting Waimea Village, and dashing to the coast for gorgeous sunsets.



On the ‘family and friends’ front

We finally managed to see more of our friends in-person after two years of isolation. Chris’ brother Rob came to town, and we went to a found-items recycled art exhibit that was an inspiration. We’ve been seeing more of George Z and reunited with Kirk and him, both so instrumental in our 1996 medical marijuana initiative victory. Marci and Tom came from Portland twice to visit us, Geoff dropped in and Brian and Diane came by when they visited their daughter and her beau. Even Mary Pat dropped in on her way through town. While we were in LA, we also got to see a number of folks, including Mikki’s



sister, Dolly, Will, Geoff, Janet and Suzanne; but our timing was off — most people were out of town or busy.



Anybody writing their memoirs yet?

This fall we went to the Oakland International Film Festival screening of a not-yet-released documentary called *American Pot Story: Oaksterdam*, a history of Oaksterdam University and our friends Richard Lee and Dale Sky Jones (Chris officiated at her wedding to Jeff Jones) in the turbulent California Prop 19 campaign of 2010. Since we both taught there and were so deeply involved, we pop up in the film from time to time. We were also surprised to see ourselves, along with other notable activists, in a picture at the California State Fair’s first-ever cannabis pavilion.

We have decades of notes, photos and year-end letters; and now it seems like a lot of our old crowd are penning memoirs. We’ve even been mentioned in a few. We’d recommend George Zimmer’s *I Guarantee It*, Allison Margolin’s *Just Dope*, and Bruce Margolin’s soon to be published *Down for the Cause*. So that’s an aspiration for the coming year, to write things down before we forget much more than we already have! Helping spur this trend of thought is that we were at California NORML events for the 50th anniversary of the group and the 1972 Prop 19 legalization campaign, and a get-together of long-time drug policy reform activists with Ethan and Marsha. It’s fun catching up with people but time is taking its toll or, as Chris prefers to see it, giving us the joys of being old.

Wrapping up with this, that and the other thing

Mikki celebrated her landmark 70th birthday with a Zoom and, later, a backyard party. Chris was expecting to have lens implant surgery this year but the doctor had an unexpected opening in October, so not only does he have a brand new astigmatism-correcting lens, he already has new contact lenses and a bunch of glasses to boot! It took a month for his eye to stabilize but, since then, it's been good. A major ocular improvement.



So far, we're pretty happy with President Biden: Passing pandemic relief, infrastructure, climate protection, chips, marriage rights, ending Covid lockdowns, bringing down the price of Rx drugs, fighting inflation, making cabinet picks and the marijuana pardons. The Supreme Court is out of control and needs to be reformed. Mikki's teacher-friend in LA, Penny, convinced Chris and niece Alethia to help register young voters in Stockton, and our candidate won. We watched the riveting January 6 Hearings, made political donations, did some text-banking and were relieved that the midterm elections didn't go any worse than they did. Woohoo, no red wave!

We're trying to stay healthy with yoga and Pilates classes, walks, Mikki's recumbent exercise bike, Chris' guitar / mini-trampoline jogs and 100 pushups a day (we'll see how long that lasts). We've had all our Covid boosters and often take a test before getting together in intimate groups or at parties, especially around the holidays. We took a few trips around SF Bay on Jan and Patti's sailboat with Ali, usually when Suzanne and Scott came to town, and a blustery autumn ferry ride to SF and a look at Victorian homes with Tom and Marci.



Chris played guitar at a few parties and nearby community events, as he loves to do, sometimes with Louise jamming along. Dan Isenstein and he started on a book about industrial hemp

in Kentucky. Mikki took two relaxing, day-long, online mindful meditation retreats with our yoga mentor, Wendy, to fortify her mindful MBSR practice.

Signing off on one year, signing up for another

We wrapped up the year in grand holiday style by hosting a Passover seder and Thanksgiving dinner, but poor Shelley and Jesse ended up hosting both Christmas and Channukah festivities. Barry and Ann were in town from LA, and gave everyone an appreciation of the fuller Channukah prayers and traditions than our typically casual candle lightings. Christmas at the Norris-Alvarez house was like a frenzied explosion of gift wrap, toys and squealing nieces, shouting out thanks to people for their plethora of gifts. We hosted a small New Year's Eve bash and potluck, sang in the new year with friends and beset the back deck with noisemakers and skewers holding 12 grapes each, to remind us to savor each of the 12 months of the coming year. We hope to get over to Europe or Mexico this year, to see more of the world and take advantage of a strong dollar.

So far, 2023 is off to a good start, with lots of rain! Chris matched up three pairs of socks in the lost-sock bag and, in between atmospheric rivers, we took a beautiful New Year sunset walk at Point Pinole on the SF Bay, still in love after all these years — and hoping to see you soon!

We'll close by wishing you a happy, healthy, peaceful, fun, safe and successful year. Please, keep in touch!

*With much love & friendship,
— Mikki & Chris*

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See more photos and the pdf at MikkiandChris.com



Earth Day. Passover with Shelley and Jess.
With Michael Gosney.



River tubing with Arya and Jane. Norris cousins in Las Vegas.

Ali, Simone and the ES Green Team marching brigade at the cold, windy and rainy El Sobrante Stroll parade.





The Struve family. The nieces' montage.



Marci and Tom in El Sobrante.

Jamming with Tim and Azure in Maui.



With Janet.



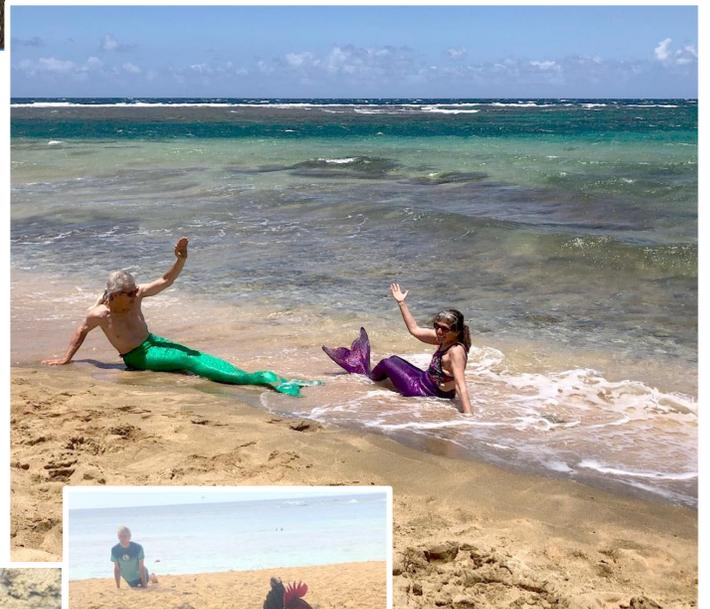
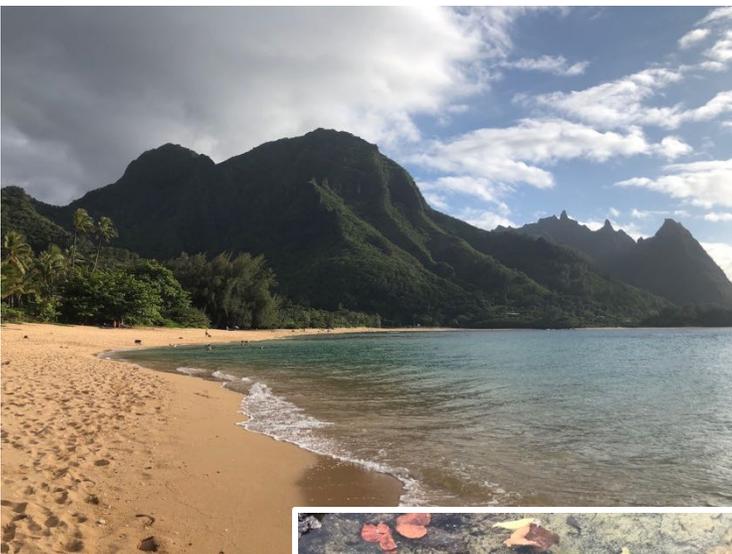
Chris harvests the last and littlest plant of the season.

With Rick, Tanya and friend at the historic botanical garden in Kauai.





More pictures from the Hawaii trip.
Chris and Mikki at Volcanoes National Park.



A mermaid couple.
An electric eel.
Yoga with chicken.

