

Let's all come together for Peace in 2024!

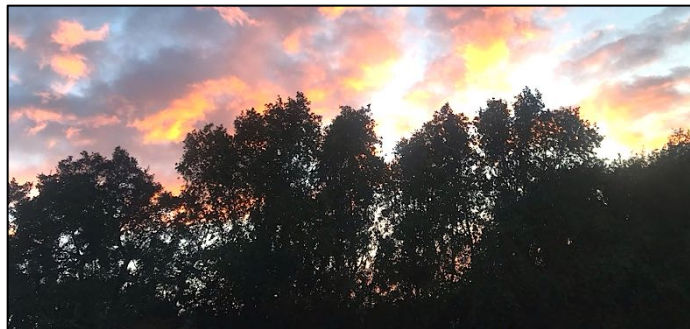
Dearest friends and family,

Well, 2023 was a lot like the Seventies, for us anyway, since we are both now in our 70s. Chris marked his birthday with 70 consecutive push-ups. We kept a focus on diet, physical activities, keeping stress to a minimum, tending to personal relationships, and using cannabis and community service as ways to connect all of the above. And yet, after three years of isolation, it only took five weeks after the travel restrictions were ended for us to catch Covid for the first time.

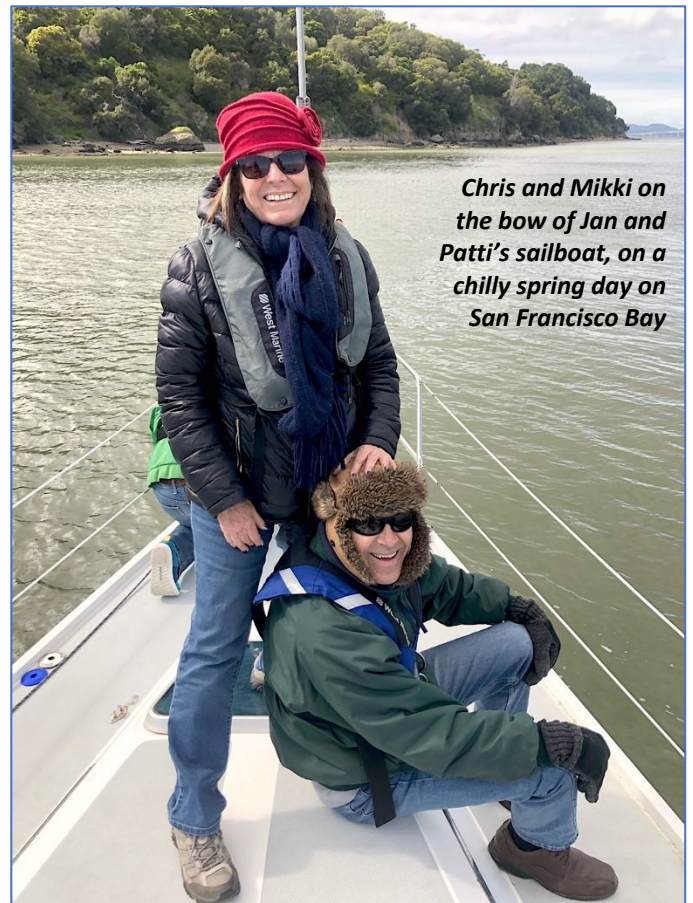
A jump from extreme drought to extreme storms

Our home came through like a charm for the first 11 winter 'atmospheric river' storms. We barely had a puddle in our yard, the ground was so thirsty. Down the hill in the riparian zone, the creek rose to its highest level since we moved in, meaning up 3-4 feet and swirling into the basin. Our little island got swept away by the creek, replaced with a fluvial fan, and we gained a sandy beach, to boot. By storm 11, a willow tree was leaning way over the creek. Then came storm 12, and over it went, knocking down other trees' limbs but still alive. The squirrels and birds loved it. Chris pruned it to look like a line of trees crossing over the creek and it was growing back again.

Months later, in July, our neighbor Nita texted to us, "so sorry about your tree," so we thought, 'What tree?' Sure enough, one of our giant oak trees had broken at the base, fell across the creek and landed atop the willow,



Back yard view. in January and in July. Inset: The downed oak and snapped alder tree.



Chris and Mikki on the bow of Jan and Patti's sailboat, on a chilly spring day on San Francisco Bay

crushing it into the far hillside, snapping off an alder tree and lots of Bay branches in the process, and exposing a big swath of what had been a shaded canyon. Luckily, it didn't hit any structures. We made the painful decision to prune off the canopy top from the remaining giants to save them from falling, too. We invited friends over for a small but meaningful ceremony before the tree service came to prune and clear debris. It was sad and traumatic to see, but we now have a view of the canyon, distant hills, a stately redwood, sky and stars that always had been obscured. It really changed the look of the yard. We now have a pretty sunny yard, which fried a lot of the shade-loving plants. Fortunately, it's still beautiful!

Gophers killed our Meyers lemon tree last year, so we planted new lemon and lime trees — in gopher baskets. Patti and Jan gave us a fig tree to help fill in a canopy gap left by the loss of our tree tops. Chris is busy working to convert all that downed timber into hillside topsoil, tiers and pathways. It feels like a meaningful contribution to the planet to restore the environment and establish a small but healthy native mini-biome and carbon sink. He plunges on, even as wildlife and weather destroy much of his hard work. The drought weakened and killed even native plants, the poor deer ate all sorts of plants they 'normally' leave alone and then the rains softened the soil and caused trees to fall. Then more gophers move in. So we put wire cages underground to protect roots, fence off

an area to keep deer out of the yard and garden and cage plants on the hill to protect sprouts and foliage. It's half *Shangri La*, half plant jail. Sometimes it feels like a vendetta but, every so often, something survives and it all seems worthwhile.

We harvested fresh-grown mint to make our nightly tea infusions, grew our own popcorn, tomatoes and flowers, including cannabis, and recently found some big and rather-tasty oyster mushrooms growing on a log!

A springtime-hop up north to the Portland zone

In March we had a Conrad family reunion in Oregon when Rob, Lucky and Nova visited from Thailand. Ruth, Missy, and Anth all made it. We had some fun, great meals, wonderful times and conversations and, of course, a 1000-piece jigsaw puzzle to assemble. On the drive up we passed Mt. Shasta, very snowy from all the storms, and stayed in Ashland. We met our old friend David Ford's sister, Carol, and her adopted daughter, Marietta, whose father is an attorney Chris worked with as cannabis expert on ± 20 court cases. What a coincidence! We helped Marci and Tom measure out the footprint of a new house extension that is ever-closer to being done — hopefully in time for our next stay(?). We visited with the Burbanks outside of town and Carolyn Moran on the drive home.

Visiting Canada, bringing home the Covid

At the end of May into June we took a trip to visit the NY Conrads and back through Canada. Rosie seemed to be doing better, thanks to a portable oxygen tank. We got to stay with Veronica and Tom while visiting Rosie, Ann Victoria, Ember, Todd, Aislinn and Scott. Tom's garden



Almost finished the jigsaw puzzle in OR. With Rose in NY. Quebec City view. Donna and Andrew in BC. Page 2

just keeps getting more beautiful and Veronica was so fantastic about taking us around. They have the greatest play area for their cats. After that we visited Montreal and Quebec City, Canada, and checked out the cannabis stores. Nice herb at a reasonable price, it turns out. Montreal has a lot



to do and see, so we took the Hop-on Hop-off bus to get an overview and see the sights. We made sure to eat Montreal's bagels and smoked meat sandwiches at the famed Schwartz' Deli, and walk through the underground city. Gorgeous Quebec City is the most European-feeling place we've seen in North America. We got to say *s'il vous plaît* and pretend we were in France. Then we headed to Vancouver BC to visit Donna, Andrew and Kial. We took great walks, saw Dana Larsen's psychedelic medicine shop (since busted) and met and were interviewed by his documentary film crew.



Chris tested positive for Covid the morning we were supposed to meet Mari Kane, Billy and Ruth Shamai and take a ferry to Gabriola Island and Victoria. So we cancelled, double-masked and flew home to recuperate. We both ended up getting it but made it through no worse than the flu. We took Paxlovid, and got over it just in time for Chris to have a surgery to lift his droopy eyelids and regain some peripheral sight. It's a nice tweak.

Determined to finish our trip to Canada that had so rudely been interrupted by Covid, Mikki set out in September, starting in Seattle with Joy Beckerman, where they visited Viv McPeak and Kanti. They took the ferry to beautiful Victoria and connected with Ruth for a few days of fun, including a Pow-Wow and a visit to the gorgeous Bouchart Gardens. Mikki went on to visit Gabriola Island, met Rob, Ruth's partner, and hung out at a bar for the first time in years. They took a third ferry to Vancouver to see Mari and Billy, and lend some moral support to Mari, who is undergoing chemotherapy for a tough medical diagnosis. Mikki got to stay with Donna and Andrew again before flying home — and testing positive for Covid on arrival, for the second time in 3½ months! Crazy, especially after



Mari, Billy, Mikki and Ruth in BC. Green Team members at our El Sobrante Stroll booth. Chris and Mikki at the Stroll. Litterbug Beth, converted to the Green Team Clean Bee. Page 3

being fully vaccinated and just recovered from Covid in June. This time, she didn't take Paxlovid to see how it went. It was like a mild cold and hopefully this time, she now has some antibodies (since it's too soon to get the updated vaccine). Fortunately, nobody she visited in Vancouver nor Chris caught it. Unfortunately, Ruth and Rob did, so Mikki suspects that Gabriola bar was the culprit. Overall, we discovered that Canadians might give you Covid – but they are always so nice while doing so.



Green Team 94803 cleans up in El Sobrante

Our community cleanup campaign is rolling along and expanding, to the point where people sometimes even comment on how much better El Sobrante looks now. Our wonderful Green Team 94803 volunteers still host 'Third Saturdays' town litter cleanups monthly and pick up trash at an adopt-a-road site. Everyone loves to pitch in and get things done. We put on these wonderful special events for Earth Day and Global Coastal Cleanup Day, and had a blast marching in the annual parade and tending our booth at El Sobrante Stroll. We coalesce with many other local groups (like SPAWNERS, which tends the creeks, and SOS! Richmond, helping local homeless neighbors) and businesses that want to improve our town. The library hosts our community events and now we're working with the Chamber of Commerce to bring some color and

beauty to the downtown main street by refreshing the big flower planters and encouraging property owners to use open wall space for murals.

Cleanup and beautification are such rewarding activities, if ever you want to take them up. One 80-year-old friend told Mikki that doing litter cleanup has become a religious experience for her, a way of giving back to the earth, while getting exercise and staying active. It's also a great way to make friends! We have too many nice folks to mention, so suffice it to say that Ramon Viray has been named our *Citizen of the Year* for his contributions to El Sobrante. Everybody else, you know who you are.

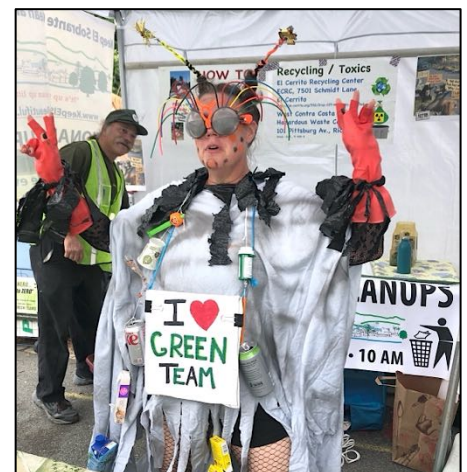
A mixture of events lights up the year for us

Mikki's still busy on the Municipal Advisory Council, so we see our county supervisor fairly often. The ESMAC is back to meeting in person and has been getting more and more productive as time goes by. We welcomed the Artist Tree to El Sobrante this year, our first adult-use cannabis store / art gallery. It's the prettiest shop in town!

A lot of people turned 70 this year. We had a nice party for Chris: He did 70 pushups and shared his thoughts on what he likes about being old. You can read it and this holiday letter at mikkiandchris.com. We also celebrated Janet, Donna and cousin Valerie's 70th. We celebrated Swami's 80th birthday, Marcelo's 60th and even went to Tuolumne to mark Banitta's 60th, where we stayed at a terrible motel in Twain Harte but found wonderful pizza nearby and took a lovely hike around Pinecrest Lake near Yosemite. We shared holidays and family birthdays with Shelley and Jesse (his health is doing much better, BTW) and went to a circus that came to town with some friends from Lakeridge Athletic Club.

We hosted a few guests, had a few dinner parties, went sailing with Patti, Jan and friends, and got to see a solar eclipse from our yard.

We added blind spot indicators for our car, which





Some Pilates classmates with Patti at Lakeridge Athletic Club. Hannukah with the Norris-Alvarez family. Page 4

helps with visibility and makes us feel safer. It made it easier to see, but not avoid, a hit-and-run drunk driver who roared up and sideswiped our car while getting off the Richmond Bridge on Labor Day weekend. We followed the car and got its license plate, but the 911 dispatcher discouraged us from further pursuit. Fortunately, the insurance company took care of it. We were also lucky that the rains kept the dams full, the fire season low, air quality good and our hopes high to keep that going.

Staying busy taking things easy

We are still enjoying our Pilates and Yoga classes and an occasional aqua jog class at Lakeridge. Mikki still spends a lot of time riding her recumbent bike and catching up on TV shows. There is a plan afoot to add bike trails to our area in another five or ten years, so that's something to look forward to someday: Actual bike rides! She again participated in the Bocce Ball Tournament. Despite her team doing poorly in the rankings, she had loads of fun. She took a Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction course with Wendy to fortify her meditation practice. Aside from yard, garden, house and website (theLeafOnline.com) maintenance, Chris spends a lot of time reading novels and books on Roman history (it turns out to be a male thing). His expert witness work is minimal these days, a few cases over the year. Thank FDR for social security! After all these decades paying in, we're finally getting some money back from the system! And still paying in.

Mikki had the pleasure of getting deep cleaning of her teeth along with oral surgery, and next she is getting ready in January to start a year and a half of Invisaligns to correct her bite. You'd think that getting braces 60 years ago would have taken care of that. Apparently, not.

We totally enjoyed, and highly recommend the series, Never Have I Ever, The Extraordinary Attorney Woo, Sex Education (Netflix), Pokerface, Bupkis and Wolf Like Me (Peacock), Ted Lasso, Schmigadoon, Morning Show, and Shrinking (Apple+). We also enjoyed the Barbie movie.



Closing thoughts on the past year and the next one

As the year drew to a close, we began work with a group of fellow activists to form a 'California Cannabis Historical Society' as a new project. It remains to be seen how this year's weather will play out but, at least, we don't have many more tall trees left to fracture or fall over, and none that threaten the house or any structures.

As we write this, the ongoing, brutal wars in Ukraine and Israel/Gaza are horrible and depressing. Peace cannot come soon enough for all the people suffering there and in other conflicts around the world.

We're very concerned for our own democracy, with Old Man Trump spouting Hitler and crying about being the big loser in 2020, mainstream media's failure to acknowledge President Joe Biden and the Democrats' big successes (infrastructure, climate legislation, economic growth, jobs growth, strong stock market, ending covid lock downs, expanding parks, ending the US/Afghani war, marijuana pardons, cooling inflation, etc.) Meanwhile, some cable outlets and social media giants promote the "Big Lie" and Putin's interests over American democracy. We hope people wake up and escape from the Q-Anon / White Supremacy swamp before it's too late, as we really want to live in a free country we can love, not a dictatorship. By this time next year, we'll see if the USA still has common values that we can all share and be proud to live here.

We wish you all a peaceful, healthy, happy, cozy and love-filled 2024, and we hope to see you again soon.

Thanks for being in our lives and for keeping in touch with us!

- Chris & Mikki

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See more photos and the pdf at MikkiandChris.com



We rounded the square labyrinth into a spiral.

*4:20 with Dana in BC.
Visiting Sandee in OR.
Mikki befriended a pigeon in Quebec City.*

*With Veronica in NY.
Anndie and Ember.*

Flooding in the creek bed. A big tree down.

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A belated backyard birthday party. Page 6
Bouchart Gardens, Victoria BC.
Mikki visiting with Viv and Joy in WA.
Popcorn on the cob snack, garden flowers.
Coastal Cleanup Day cleanup sign-in area.
Norris-Alvarez-Struve girls around the firepit,
Thanksgiving at Marissa and Brent's.
Farmer Chris giving the garden compost tea.

