

Remembering Joe Mandell, Avid Folk Dancer and Musician

by Linnea Mandell (with editorial help from family members, Dana Mandell, Douglas Mandell, Miriam Lewis, Craig Kurumada, Marion Mandell)

On Feb. 19, 2021, we lost my father Joseph Mandell to COVID, at the age of 92. He and Marion, his wife of 70 years, became a couple in college at Rutgers, where they were first started folk dancing together.

They married in 1951 and moved to Pasadena where Dad earned his doctorate in microbiology at Cal Tech. Joe studied viruses with Linus Pauling, and Marion worked to put Dad through graduate school. At Cal Tech, they danced and taught regularly at the Pasadena Folk Dance Co-op, along with their friend, John Filcich.

From there they moved to Long Island where Linnea and Douglas were born. Since there was no folk dancing there, they started their own club in Huntington. They also enjoyed trips to Folk Dance House in New York to dance with Mary Ann and Michael Herman. **Dick Crum was a regular teacher there**, and he also came out to dance at their local club where they learned his “mixed pickles” tip for dancing U Sest and shared it with dancers for many years.

In 1958, the family moved to Palo Alto where Dad did research at Stanford Research Institute. Dana was born in 1960, the same year they bought the house in Palo Alto which is still the family home. They danced with the Palomanians and other nearby groups, and attended parties with the Santa Clara Valley Folk Dancers where their kids became part of a children’s performing group led by Ned and Marion Gault. **They also started a children’s folk dance club that attracted 50-60 children every Friday night**, and directed the Palo Alto Junior Folk Dancers children’s group that participated in Kolo Festival and United Nations Day celebrations.

For about ten years, Dad and Mom took the family to summer folk dance week at Feather River Camp near Quincy. Although it might seem challenging to take three children under the age of five to a rustic dance camp, the greater challenge came as we got older: convincing the teachers that

the Mandell kids were serious dancers who knew the steps and should be allowed to participate!

Joe switched to teaching and became chair of the Biology Department at University of Santa Clara

where he taught microbiology, biology and genetics and was required to dress very conservatively. He then moved to West Valley College and taught biology, microbiology and chemistry. In this informal environment of the 60s and 70s, Joe grew long hair and wore a leather headband. He was much beloved by his students who thought he was a “really cool” professor. Joe was known for making his classes especially fun. He liked to include science jokes at the end of his exams, and the sound of giggles would let him know when a student had reached the end of a test. His microbiology labs included food applications like

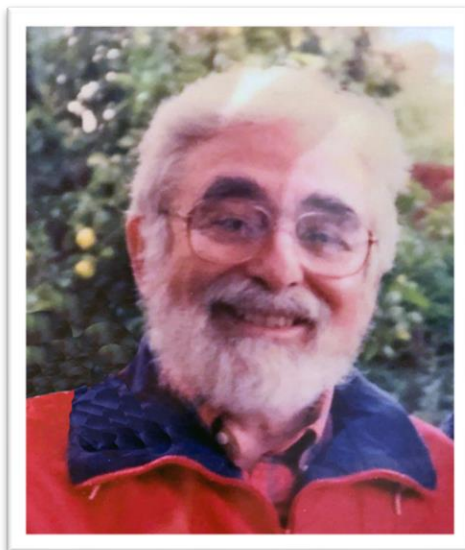
making sourdough starter, yogurt, and beer.

When Joe retired at 65, he kept very busy! He fulfilled a lifetime dream of learning to play violin, and played for 15 years with the senior community orchestra. Joe also volunteered in the schools, teaching science and assisting music teachers by tuning instruments and coaching children. **He also served on the board of the Friends of the Mendocino Woodlands.**

Dad attended Mendocino Balkan Camp and Folklore Camp for many years where he was known as a beloved camp Grandpa to many people, as well as the guy who liked to wear silly hats. Joe especially loved his tamburitza, violin, and accordion classes with John Morovich, Miamon Miller, Mark Forry, Beth Cohen, and Michael Lawson, and the family would like to share our appreciation for all the joy these wonderful teachers brought to him.

Joe enjoyed woodworking, and made some of the household furniture. He was also an enthusiastic photographer who spent many hours developing photos in his garage dark room. He loved going to Saturday yard sales and eating breakfast every Sunday at the Palo Alto Hobee’s where, like on *Cheers*, everyone knew his name.

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A dedicated mycologist, Joe was president of the San Francisco Mycological Society for two years and served as a mushroom expert for the poison control line, assisting when someone's child or pet ate an unidentified mushroom. He loved gardening, but had an ongoing struggle with the large population of hungry neighborhood squirrels which he would carefully trap and rehome in Baylands Park.

Joe was always known for his kindness, cheer, and warm heartedness. He was quick with a joke and everyone enjoyed his intelligent and interesting conversations. He will be fondly remembered by all who knew him.

The Mandells would like to encourage everyone to contribute stories, photos and memories to an online memorial at

<https://www.forevermissed.com/joseph-mandell>.

Additional ways to remember Joe might include singing, playing, or dancing in his memory or contributing to the [EEFC](#) in his name.



Appalachian night at Folklore Camp 2014 (with Linnea Mandell and Craig Kurumada)