



Arthur Furst: the dance of life

"Dancing makes me feel strong. I never stand up as straight as when I'm dancing."

If that is the case, then Palo Alto resident Arthur Furst must have stood up straight indeed when 110 FOAs (Friends of Arthur) showed up to dance alongside him at his 80th birthday party last month.

For Furst, there have always been two lures in life: dance and science. Fifty years ago, while a student at the University of California, Los Angeles, he felt compelled to choose between the two, and he chose science.

Judging by the recognition he has received for his work in cancer research, he chose wisely. Furst developed the first method of oral chemotherapy and pioneered re-

that, he has received—among other "things for the ego"—the 1986 Klaus Schwarz commemorative medal, the UCLA Award for Excellence in Professional Achievement and a commendation from the California state senate.

And, in keeping with the credo of academia, he has published, published, published. His most influential book is "The Chemistry and Chelation of Cancer," still considered a seminal book in the field.

Yet for all the recognition, Furst's son Timothy is even more famous. The younger Furst is a member of the hirsute comic juggling team, the Flying Karamazov Brothers. (For the record, they don't fly, aren't Russian and aren't brothers. But they are hirsute).

Not that Furst minds being out-

"I bask in his fame. Besides, I'm the one who taught him to juggle."

Born in Minneapolis, Furst was orphaned at age 4 when his parents died in the 1918 flu epidemic. He went to Los Angeles to live with an aunt and uncle and stayed until he graduated from UCLA in chemistry. In 1948, he came to Palo Alto with his wife, Florence, to get a doctorate at Stanford. Furst joined the faculty at Stanford, while Florence worked as a librarian in the chemistry library. In 1992, after 52 years of marriage, Florence was killed by a speeding teen-age driver. The couple have four children.

In 1961, Furst joined the faculty at the University of San Francisco, where he remained until his retirement in 1981. But what Furst calls retirement, most people would call work. He maintains a heavy schedule of teaching, consulting for a pharmaceutical company in Fremont, lecturing throughout the country and overseeing graduate students at USF. "Whenever I have a spare moment, I write research papers."

And, of course, he dances, mostly Balkan, sometimes Greek, always with relish. Only twice has he stopped dancing, the first time while at UCLA. "In those days, it wasn't considered manly to dance, so I started wrestling." Having proved his "macho abilities" on the mats, he returned to dance, only give it up again because he felt too old. "Then I got to a point I didn't care what people thought. There would just be this old, bald guy dancing."

As he learned, the spirit of later-life dancer may be willing but the flesh can be, well, somewhat altered. "I've gained about 12 pounds since my wife died," he said, patting his paunch. "I look at my body in the mirror dancing and I don't recognize it as my body."

Even with the expanded profile, he "feels great."

"I'm healthier than my young doctor," he boasts. He attributes this to goodly quantities of dancing and wholesome food, although he fudges somewhat on the food part. An inveterate "nosher," he is "80 percent vegetarian" but eats anything put in front of him. "I don't go for extremes."

He can also count what may be the greatest tonic of all: the 110 FOAs who came to his birthday party. "I don't think most of these people even know me," he joked. "I think they just read the flier and saw that it said 'free dancing and refreshments.'"

—Diana Sussman