

Marike Anderson:

CREATING LIGHT FOR ALTADENA

BY MICHELLE LONGO

PHOTO BY JOHN KANDALAFT



Marike Anderson has lived many lives, and perhaps not all of it was according to plan. But she continues to build light where it's needed most. And her son, eight-year-old Bodhi, sits in the center of it all.

"I also have two stepchildren, Jonathon (26) and Maya (24), who live nearby," she shares. "We had — and still have — an extraordinary blended family. My stepchildren and their mom are an incredible source of love and support for Bodhi and me."

Marike met her husband, Edwin Aguilar, when she was teaching 9th grade World Cultures at Palisades Charter High School. Edwin was leading an animation workshop for her students. He had grown up in El Salvador during the war and fled to the United States when he was nine. On scholarship, he later studied animation and went on to work on *The Simpsons* for more than 20 years.

On that fateful day they met, Marike asked Edwin to draw Side-show Bob on her classroom whiteboard, and it stayed there until she left Pali years later.

"He took about 30 minutes to draw it," Marike recalls, "though it probably should have taken two."

Edwin passed away in 2021. Marike says, "I have too many great memories to choose just one, but I miss the everyday moments the most: trips to the store, grilling by the pool, chatting in the hammock, playing with Bodhi, and gathering with family and friends."

Marike's professional life began in public education. She earned her undergraduate degree in Secondary Education, Social Stud-



ies from Saint Louis University and her master's in Urban School Leadership from University of California, Los Angeles. Her graduate program focused on social justice and equity, shaping her work as both a teacher and assistant principal.

"I approached education holistically, prioritizing relationships in a system originally built on a factory model," Marike explained. She is still in touch with many former students, which is a testament to the relational foundation she built.

But after Edwin passed, everything shifted.

Marike took a leave from her career, unsure what the future held. During the early days of the pandemic, she had begun painting. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, her identity began to change. When her leave ended, she realized she wasn't going back.

"I needed a new path aligned with my creative spirit."

That spark led her somewhere unexpected: candle-making. What began as exploration evolved into Altadena Candle Company, a business born from grief, creativity, and the quiet insistence on light.

All the while, Marike has been raising Bodhi, whom she says is "extraordinarily resilient and magical." Having experienced profound loss at a young age, he maintains a playful and joyful spirit. In fact, if he could choose anywhere to be, it would be wandering up the creek near Jet Propulsion Laboratory, building dams and throwing rocks.

Bodhi inhabits what Marike calls "a liminal space between imagination and reality where everything is alive and in conversation." Recently, as they walked down the stairs of their apartment building to scooter to school, Bodhi passed the sign for the second floor and cheerfully said, "Goodbye, Second Level! I'm off to school!"

Marike knew her role instantly. "Goodbye, Bodhi! Have a great day!" she replied, as the second floor.

"My best parenting happens when I agree to be the voice of the living world around us," she said.

It is in these conversations that imagination becomes connective tissue between mother and son and between visible and invisible worlds. This includes talking to Edwin. Though he passed when Bodhi was three, they never stopped speaking to him. Bodhi asks questions, and Marike answers as his father.

"In that moment, I am him," she explains. "It matters deeply when Bodhi wants to share an accomplishment and hear that his dad is proud of him — which he is."

Marike's home in Altadena stood on the west side near Lincoln and Altadena, within walking distance of Loma Alta Park, the JPL creek, and Cheney Trail. She and Edwin moved there when Bodhi was one, drawn partly by family proximity but equally by the land itself.

"The crisp mountain air and old trees captivated me from my first visit," she says.



After moving to Los Angeles from the Midwest 25 years ago, beginning in Venice and slowly making her way east, Altadena felt different. Warm. Neighborly. Rooted.

"The blend of progressive history, bohemian spirit, and small-town feel made it the perfect fit for us."

After the fire, Marike and Bodhi fled to South Pasadena, where her brother lives. She rented the first place she found, which turned out to sit at the center of many community events.

"It is extraordinary here as well—deeply neighborly and wonderfully walkable."

Still, the Altadena pull stays strong.

Last month, Marike's Altadena neighbors organized a block party, which was something they'd never done before. Kids who had never played together ran in packs. Adults toured a nearly finished rebuild, celebrating the progress. Potluck dishes were shared as the sun set behind the mountains, "steady sentinels through the chaos of the past year."

"Altadena is sacred to me—the place of my most profound loss and deepest healing," Marike said. She hopes to return when her home is rebuilt, carrying an even deeper sense of connection and gratitude.

When asked what message Marike would like to share with her neighbors, she said, "To my neighbors, thank you for the incredible support you've shown me and Altadena Candle Company. What began as a creative spark during a difficult season has grown because of this community—because you've come to markets, shared kind words, collaborated, and believed in what I'm building. Through this business, I've had the privilege of getting to know so many of you more deeply, and that has been one of the greatest gifts."

"I hope my company reflects the beauty and spirit of this place—the resilience, creativity, warmth, and care that make Altadena so special. It is truly an honor to create something that belongs to and is inspired by this community."



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