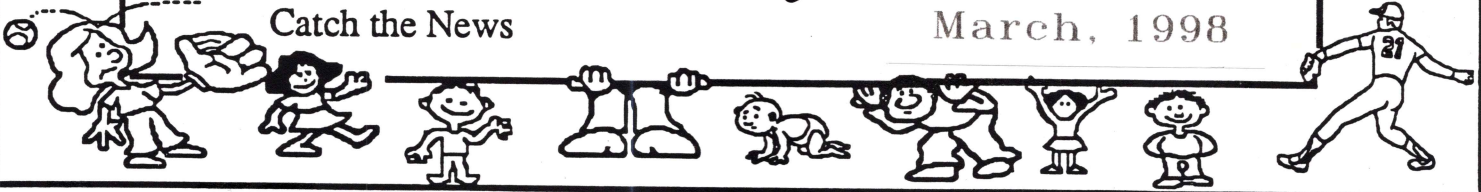




The Riel Family Newsletter

Catch the News

March, 1998



VALENTINE'S DAY PARTY AT MEHAN FAMILY HOME

AUNT ISA AND MICHAEL MERICA FAMILY GUESTS OF HONOR

Although a big rainstorm passed through San Diego on the evening of March 14th the Valentine's day party went ahead as scheduled. Most of the family came and enjoyed some party snacks followed by a great buffet style dinner. Margaret and Bud outdid themselves in putting together the entire party, and items contributed by family members added up to a great feast. Aunt Isa and Michael and family enjoyed the chance to get acquainted with our family. We also took the opportunity to "fine tune" the Merica family chart that is being put together for eventual publication in RFNL. In spite of the stormy weather everyone had a most enjoyable evening, and we all thank Bud and Margaret for making the party such a great success. We have some pictures of the event, and some are shown on page 2.

PHOTO ALSO USED IN OCT 98 ISSUE

TRAVEL NEWS

Grandpa and Grandma enjoyed another vacation in Los Vegas recently, and had a great time. Grandma had invited Aunt Isa to come with us, and she was glad to join us, especially since one of her nephews lives in Las Vegas. She preferred to take the plane, and met us there, staying in the same hotel, the Plaza, one of our favorites. We left San Diego on Monday, and Tuesday morning Isa's nephew volunteered to show us around the town. His name is Constantine Sitar, and his address is 2606 S. Durang Drive, #163, Las Vegas 89117. In spite of more rain we visited the strip and several of the big casinos. We especially enjoyed the shopping mall in Caesars Palace, which certainly is a spectacular facility. Isa had a list of "Beanie Babies" she wanted to get for her family in Athens, and some of the desired ones were found in one of the shops. We also got in a little gambling, and had some good and some bad luck. We introduced Isa to Las Vegas style bingo, and she came within one number (several calls) of winning a \$1,000.00 prize. Unfortunately her number never was called.

We also enjoyed some of the great buffet lunches. One of the best was at the new Rio casino, the blue and purple building located west of I-15. They serve and almost endless variety of items, and it is difficult to sample more than a few of them.

It was a great trip, and we have a few pictures, some shown in the next column.

The traveler of the month award, however, goes to Francie. In addition to the trips reported in last months issue she also took in a trade show in Las Vegas and a cruise to Ensenada. The latter was hosted



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AUNT ISA AND GRANDMA ENJOY A CHAT



LINDA AND LISTY GET ACQUAINTED



BOB, MICHAEL AND ED ENJOY A DISCUSSION



MICHAEL AND LINDA TALK WITH BOB



JEFF HELPS BUD CARVE THE LAMB ROAST



MARGARET SERVES UP SOME PARTY SNACKS

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by iso, for the enjoyment of about a hundred of the members of the Iso sales staff. She reports that it was a lot of fun. The travel fun is over, however, in that the next two trips are to Montana and Indianapolis, Indiana, not exactly the Jamaicas of the mid-west. Francie says that recently she has been on the road more than at home.

The following picture of Francie in action was taken at the recent Las Vegas trade show. She tells us that she hates Las Vegas, because there are too many people and too much turmoil. However, she admitted that she enjoyed seeing Lyle in some winning action at the craps table.



Two other travelers are none other than Brett and Bryce, who are being treated by Alan to their annual Padres spring training trip. Since the Padres are having an outstanding spring training season we know the kids are having a great time.

BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

There were no celebrations in February, and Grandma is falling seriously behind in this department. She hopes to catch up soon, however.

BIRTHDAY CALENDAR FOR MARCH

Margaret Riel	March 6	48
Jessica Benesch	March 17	15
Craig Hartman	March 19	15
Jeff Benesch	March 23	46

SOME NAMES IN THE NEWS

Recently we had a chance to visit Ed Riel's home building project in Escondido, and saw that the next phase of the project is just getting under way. The Saturday, March 7th edition of the Union-Tribune contains a nice article in the HOME BUYING IN SAN

DIEGO section, page 2, on the Vintage Creek project. We understand from Ed that all but one of the homes in the first phase have been sold, and things look good for the next phase.

We hear that although Craig Hartman still has another year to drive he already has acquired his vehicle, a used Chevrolet truck. He and dad Bruce will be restoring it to mint condition, and it should be ready to go by the time 1999 rolls around.

Grandma got a call from Annie Gillingham recently, to ask if she would talk to the 5th grade class at Francis Parker. Grandma agreed, and on March 6th she, along with Grandpa and Listy met at Annie's classroom. Prior to the meeting the scope of her discussion was worked out by Grandma, Grandpa and Listy over lunch at Sizzlers. The main theme of the presentation was a discussion of what it was like to grow up in a foreign land back in the 1930-40 era. The children seemed to enjoy hearing about that experience, and how much it differed from the life and school they experience. We took some pictures which will be printed in the next issue of RFNL.

Francie tells us that Brett is becoming quite an expert in the skateboarding arena, and on page four we print a picture showing him doing his thing at a local facility. It looks pretty scary, but he seems to know how to come down safely. (see picture on page 4)

MISSION HILLS...HOW WE GOT HERE FROM THERE

We have room in this issue for another chapter in the history of Mission Hills.

HOME SWEET HOME

.....
BY A DAM SITE

(continued from February)

Mission Hills also got its first home and living, breathing resident in 1887. Captain Johnson never built on Inspiration Point but on May 31, 1887, his widow Ellen deeded the land to her daughter Sarah Johnson Miller. She filed a subdivision map for the area bounded by Witherby, Sunset, Saint James and Guy Streets, naming it "Johnson Heights." She set aside the highest point for herself where she would build the dream house her father never started.

Work started in the summer of 1887 at the same time the Hotel del Coronado was being built. When Miller heard that S.S. Orizaba was being scrapped, she bought the salon sideboard and other pieces of the old ship. She then incorporated them into the home she called "Villa Orizaba." Until 1907 the house stood alone in commanding splendor. It still stands today at 2036 Orizaba; on the street named in honor of the vessel called the "Mayflower of San Diego."

Drop Just To Shop

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For Miller and her husband shopping was a major undertaking and had some risks. They had to hitch up the horse and buggy, then climb aboard for a nerve-racking ride. The only road to Old Town was down a steep grade with a hairpin turn. To make a major purchase they would catch a steam train to fifth and

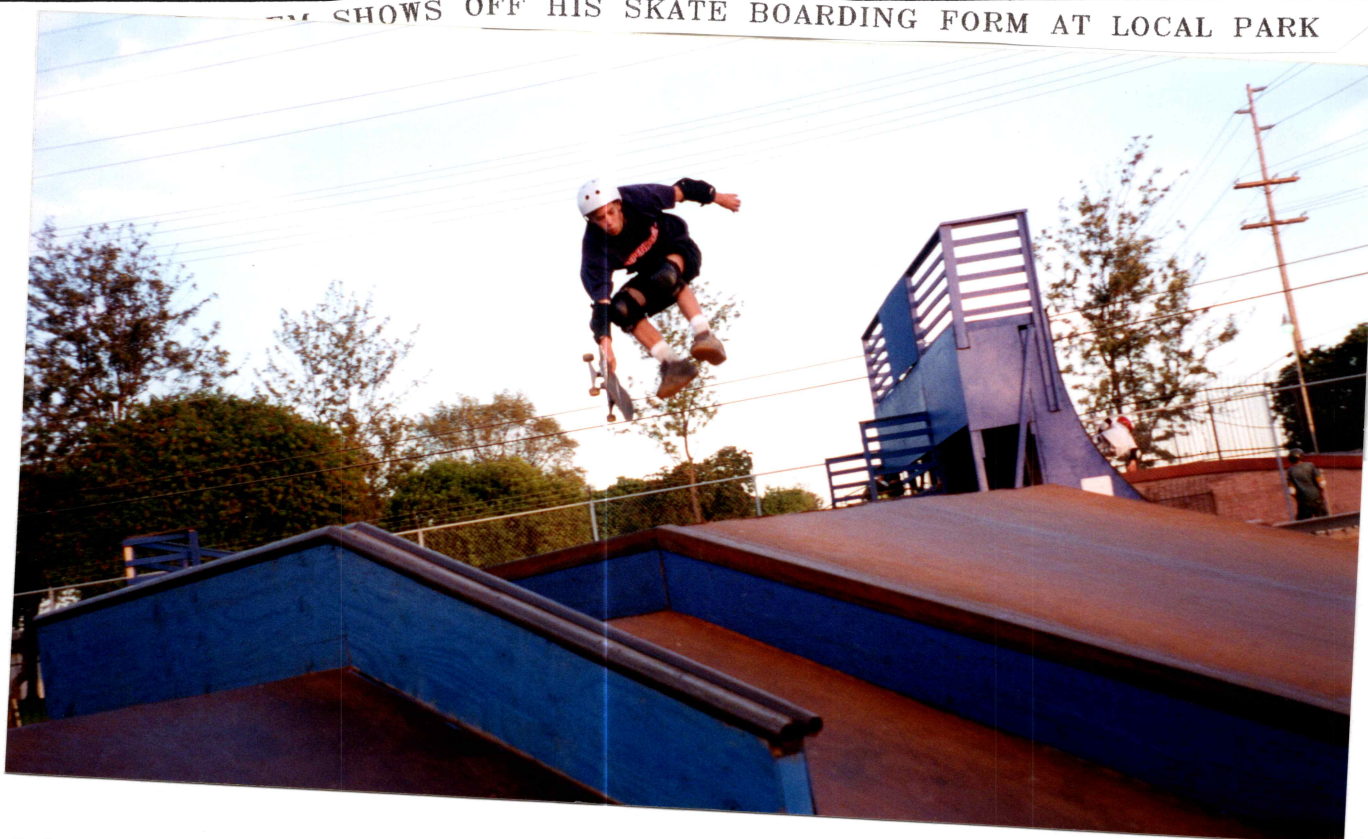
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..... SHOWS OFF HIS SKATE BOARDING FORM AT LOCAL PARK



L downtown. There they'd either get on a horse-drawn street car or walk along muddy or dusty streets, up Fifth Avenue to Marston's Department Store.

Shopping then, as now, is an all day affair. Back then, though, there was much more "dropping" than shopping.

TOO FAR OUT

.....

As the century turned, the Miller family was still the only residents in Johnson Heights. For that matter they were about the only people living in Mission Hills. There was a citrus grove near Trias Street and an olive grove where the Mission Hills First Congregational Church stands today. As late as 1908 the residential "deadline" was First Avenue at Washington according to Oscar Cotton, a real estate developer of the day.

"About 1904 I drove over the remaining 30 acres with Mrs. Miller who wanted me to put in a high-class subdivision and sell the lots for \$1,000 each...but I thought the property too far out ever to amount to much in my lifetime," said Cotton.

ON "TRACK"

.....

Kate Sessions hoped Cotton was right. She had come to San Diego in 1884 aboard the S.S. Orizaba. She'd been hired by the Russ School (now San Diego High School) as one of its first teachers. According to oral history, Sessions resigned on the spot one afternoon in 1887 after a group of boys locked her in a locker.

was horticulture and she wanted to spend more time with it. Her first gardens were in Balboa Park which she almost single-handed planted.

In 1903 she began buying up land in Mission Hills after losing her Balboa Park lease. She chose this area because of its good soil, moist sea breezes, and because it was so far away from everything, she hoped she wouldn't be disturbed for years.

Eventually Sessions owned or leased most of the North Florence Heights section (created in 1890 north of the cemetery and bounded on the east and west by Randolph and Stevens Streets) as well as several blocks in Arnold and Choate's.

The whole area bloomed under her supervision with an ocean of poinsettias in the fall and sea lavender in the spring. While her land bloomed, her business didn't. On of the main benefits for Sessions, the location's remoteness, was also the main stumbling block for her customers. Not only was it remote, but the road was dangerously close to the canyon ridge overlooking Mission Valley.

Like the merchants of today, Sessions decided she needed to make it easy for shoppers to reach her. So in 1907 she and Alice Rainford (later of Rainford Florists) began circulation a petition asking property owners to support extending the electric trolley car line from First Avenue and Washington to Lewis Street. Since many property owners did not live in the immediate area, the duo traveled all over by horse and buggy rounding up signatures. With property owners approval, the city widened the necessary roads in 1908 and J.D. Spreckles, the owner of the San Diego Electric Railway Company, began extending the trolley line. By 1909 you could go from Market Street in downtown to Lewis and Stevens Streets. In 1913 there track was extended from Lewis to the intersection of Fort Stockton and Trias.