





ANNIE TRAVELS (continued from page 1).

In other RFNL news, Miguel and Jessica graced me with their presence in Madrid for a weekend!! It was so fun to have family here! We ate a lot of delicious meals and walked around town. Unfortunately, I had to work with the children (see above) for part of the time they were there, so they will have to contribute their own dazzling RFNL articles o let you all in on their Madrilenos adventures (hint hint). t looks like my next visit home will be at some point in June to welcome my nephew, Liam, into the world! I am sooo excited to be an aunt. I also can't wait to turn Liam into a super Euro-metro, Spanish-speaking stud (insert Seamus, "Oh!" here). That's all for now. You're welcome for this gem of an article. Front page? I think, yes. Amor (love) from Spain! Annie

Thanks, Annie for this great report. You got the front page and then some. We only hope that you will send in some more news as it happens.

## Some follow up on Riel Bowl XX

In the January RFNL we printed a comment by Birdy on Roberts Riel Bowl XX book. As we mentioned, there were other accolades of equal merit, and as we promised, we print them now.

Dear Family

,I wanted to officially thank Robert for the book as I know things were rushed towards the end. This project was something he was working on since he announced his retirement at the end of Riel Bowl 19 (just about a year). In March, I saw the first draft which was already 50 pages in length, with no end in sight because big events kept happening (thanks to all of the weddings and engagements). If you missed Riel Bowl 20, be sure to ask your parents to see the final copy as it is a work of art and the time and energy he put into the project deserves noting. The final drafts (and yes, there were many final drafts) were given to me over the summer to read and I read through it over and over again. Every time I looked through it, I was impressed with the items he picked to celebrate, how fairly he showed each family, and how well he took a project that Dad started so long ago (the RFNL), and made it a lasting keepsake for all of us. Though our gift to Robert was meager in comparison....it was heartfelt in that we do love and appreciate all that he's done to keep us together celebrating our family tradition of Christmas with almost everyone there. We missed Tim, Francie, Lyle, Brett, Bryce, (and little Lyle), Alan, Dustin, Lauren, Jessica (and baby to be), Miguel, Scott, JJ, Richard, Liz, and Annie, but we also understand that pulling such a large group together is never easy especially given the miles

that separate us from many of them. Special thanks to the newbie (Dave) for coming and the next generation of grandchildren's spouses (Ana, Seamus, Lauren and Nicole) and significant somebodies (Megan, Ashley, and Chavva) and our favorite great nephews (Matthew and Corbin) for spending a full day with us going down memory lane....we know it's a long day and not as much fun for you at times....but it is very important to us and we loved having you there to help you understand where this family came from and how it has evolved over time.

Thanks to Mom and Dad for teaching us all how to love and give to each other....and to Robert for finding a way to let us know how much he cares about us. And finally, to Birdy....the author, editor, creator, song selector, and amazing sister for putting the movie together....it also was a piece of art and will be something we'll cherish forever....much love,

Listy

Hi all,

Like Carol, Listy and Birdy, the same scene played out at our house. Bud took the book first and read through most of it. He was so amazed at the deeply personal letters Bob sent to each of us. I read these and was really touched. We are all getting a view from your eyes of the early years of the Riel Family. Megan and Michael had fun reading through the different sections. We are all amazed by the words, the images and beauty of the work.

Birdy expressed my thoughts exactly, we had so little extended family interactions in our early life and what a difference from that of the kids that are forming the third and fourth generation. We had the joys and challenges of a big family--many children in one household. None of the eight was brave enough to replicate 8 kids... But now there is the huge extended family. And I love it.

For any holiday there are always enough people around to make it fun. Since people change so much -- connecting with any of the known family members is always a treat and at every family connection we meet new people. And that is the way it will be for some time forward as 21 (third generation) find life partners.

Thanks for taking the time to reflect on where we have been. We all love the book and the movie and the years of rfnl, calendars, and all of the other wonderful products of the Riel family. (And I will not part with the rocking lion....no matter how old he gets....) What a great family!

Thanks to every last one of you...I love the connection. And Birdy, thanks for your reflection that family building is an art not to be neglected--it rings true....and makes a great New Year resolution.

Margaret

Here is an update on Bruce's back surgery being scheduled...we hope soon.... Birdy

According to the MRI I have "Severe Spinal Canal Narrowing" of the lumbar spine. Spinal Stenosis, as it is known, is generally defined as the spinal canal measuring smaller than 12mm since that seems to be the average diameter of the spinal cord. In my case there are several places that are measured at 4 to 5mm and one particular area that measures 1 to 2mm putting a great deal of pressure on my spinal cord and the reason that I can't stand for more than a couple minutes at a time. It was amazing to see the MRI images showing these areas as small as 1 to 2 mm smashing the nerves with the doctor's explanation as we looked at them. The pictures are even painful to look at!

This condition is due to several reasons. I have degenerative arthritis in all the joints, two bulging discs at L4-5 and L5-S1 and the more serious problem of an inordinate amount of lipids (fats) on the nerve sheath in the canal caused by years of corticosteroid use. Also being considered is Neutral lipid storage disease which also explains fatty liver, enlarged heart and myopathy .

The surgeon said he will operate on five levels of my spine, L2 thru S1. This will be done as if it is five separate surgeries through five separate smaller incisions (minimally invasive technique) to speed recovery rather than "open spine surgery." He said it would be a long procedure but feels it is the right way to go.

Surgery for lumbar spinal stenosis involves cutting out damaged parts of the spine to open up the canal and in this case to remove the lipids from the nerve sheath and canal. The idea is to remove everything that is putting pressure on the nerve(s) which will restore my back to allow standing and walking.

This problem is completely unrelated to the muscle disease but if the surgery is successful it should make it possible to move and exercise to some extent. The benefits of which would be enormous and, at the same time, extend the time before any assistive devices (scooter or walker) might be needed as a result of this damned muscle disease. This should dramatically improve our quality of life!  
Bruce

Thanks, Bruce, for filling us in on the latest developments. Let us know when a firm date is set for the surgery. We all will be hoping and praying for a successful result  
Bruce

## Robert Riel named as Riel Bowl Commissioner Emeritus



In the last issue of RFNL it was reported that the president of the Riel Bowl Association had indicated that ex-commissioner Robert Riel would be granted the honorary title of "Riel Bowl Commissioner Emeritus", in recognition of not only his many years service at the Riel Bowl celebrations but also as the author of the best selling history book "Riel Bowl XX 2011 The History of a Riel era". That action was formalized recently when President Frank Riel released an official proclamation of the award. Robert commented that after the year long of working on the above-mentioned book and the twenty Riel Bowl celebrations he was happy to assume a role having no responsibilities. We join the rest of the family in expressing our thanks to Robert and his family for the many years of dedicated service.

In a related announcement the President officially confirmed the appointment of Carol Benesch as the Riel Bowl XXI commissioner. One of her first official acts will be to select a firm date for next year's celebration. Although it always has been on January the first, some have pointed out that since some family members now live outside of outside of the San



Diego area and since January second is a working day it is difficult for them to return home in time. The 28<sup>th</sup> has been suggested as a better choice. We are sure that Carol would welcome your thoughts on this subject.

## Grandma distributes Persian Silver

As many of you know, Grandma has a collection of Persian silverware which she either brought with her when she came to the United States in 1946 or acquired when she visited her parents in about 1960. At one time the various pieces were used or displayed when we lived in the old Lyndon Road home. Some of the Riel girls remember polishing the various pieces. When we moved to the new Lyndon Road home Grandma became concerned about security, since some of the larger items were very valuable and irreplaceable. Hence, during the move they were locked in either a foot locker or a large hope chest. When we moved to the condo they remained in the safe locations.

Recently Grandma has talked to her daughters and they decided that the time has come to distribute to each Riel child the various items. So Grandpa and Grandma, one recent day, got out everything and Grandma decided how to distribute everything eight ways. She then called each person to come and receive their gift of silver. We have requested that, for the record, each recipient photograph their items. Since some of the items have a story on how they were acquired, we have decided to print the pictures and describe, from Grandma's memory, the story. We will include in this issue only the first two (and only) pictures we have received.

Francie's items are shown below. The large serving dish and plate actually were purchased when Grandma visited her parents in Tehran in 1960. The small vase is one of a



number of various sizes turned out by local silversmiths. The small bowl and plate is one of a set of six in the initial items brought here when Grandma first came to the USA. Although they were listed on the original manifest as candy dishes, Grandma said they actually are finger bowls. In case you are not familiar with that term, it describes a container for water, and in expensive restaurants at the end of the meal each guest was served with the finger bowl to wash their fingers. I remember years ago this was common practice, especially in the eastern part of the USA. Today, if you are lucky you may be given a little paper package containing a damp paper cloth. Today the finger bowls are used for candy, or any finger food.

The tea set has an interesting history, according to Grandma. She recalls her father telling her that one day he was approached by a local man who asked for a money gift or loan. Mr. Merica agreed to help him if he would leave a valuable item in case he did not pay back the money. He offered the tea set and Grandma's father agreed, although he was not sure if the man actually owned the tea set or had



stolen it. (Probably the latter) In any case, the man never returned with the money, thus the tea set came to the Merica family, and was included in the items Grandma brought with her in 1946. The set consists of a tray plus four pitchers (the vase is not a part of the set), and the style is copied from a similar English set. However, based on the design detail it probably was made by a Persian silversmith. Since tea bags were not available at that time, brewing of tea required four pitchers: one to brew a strong tea, one holding hot water, and one for cream. The forth was a sugar bowl.

As we get the rest of the pictures they will be featured in future RFNL issues.

## Listy and Bob complete a home remodeling plan

Recently, Bob and Listy completed an extensive home remodeling project, and sent us a couple of pictures. We have room for just one, and it looks like they did a great job. We hope to get a more complete story and pictures for a future RFNL.

