

The Riel Family Newsletter

Catch The News

February 2012

RFNL 252



Grandma Edith Remembers When...

Recently, I had the opportunity to sit down with Grandma Edith (and Grandpa Frank) and talk about her life growing up in Iran, how she met Grandpa and anything else that might come up. The following questions and answers are a recap of that conversation (the full one hour interview is available at Riel.org):

RFNL: Tell me about an average day in your life when you were a young girl.

Edith: ... well I have to think it's not just something that comes ZOOM!

RFNL: Where did you sleep? Did you have your own bedroom?

Edith: Yes, I think so, but it could have been when my brother Romulus and his first wife lived with us. Let's see her first name was Larissa but we called her La La.

RFNL: First wife? What happened? Did they get divorced?

Edith: Well it was an ugly thing...

RFNL: OK we won't go there. When you got up in the morning did you make your own breakfast?

Edith: No we used to have Ma Mood.

RFNL: Ma Mood? Who is that?

Edith: Well he was everything. He helped the cook, he helped the maids when they would come to do the laundry. He would help them wash and put the cloths out to dry because you didn't

have washers and dryers like today.

RFNL: So did he live there or just come every day?

Edith: No. Ma Mood lived with us in fact he was the only one to live with us. He was my age maybe a year or two older.

RFNL: Oh so he was a house boy?

Edith: Yes, but of course he grew up and stayed with my family until my dad died. The reason he stayed was that dad told him that he would hold a certain amount each month from his pay so that when he left, Ma Mood would have enough to buy a farm.

So when dad finally died, my sister-in-law told me that they gave him the money and never saw him again. I'm sure he went to buy his farm because land was too expensive in Tehran, he must have gone back to the village he came from.

RFNL: So Ma Mood would get you up and arrange for you to have breakfast?

Edith: Yes, we usually would have toast and jam, but nobody had too much in the morning. Lunch and supper were the main meals and also at 4:00 we would have tea and a dessert like cookies, cake or something. So the morning was not a very important meal.



RFNL: So where did you go to school?

Edith: Well this is another thing, under 12 we lived in Tabriz, we had a tennis court, and a zoo. My brother Nico had a zoo there when he lived. He had an accident with gasoline it was terrible. But he loved animals so he had a little zoo.

RFNL: A zoo, what kind of animals did he have? Did he have a giraffe?

Edith: No! No! Nothing like that, he had little animals like rabbits. It was an area about the size of our kitchen with screens to separate the animals. He had horses, fowl, cats, and dogs, we had so many dogs both out and in, he was such an animal lover. Let's see, what else, he loved animals and he loved cars, he would take them all apart and put them together again.

RFNL: How old was Nico?

Edith: Nico? Old, a lot older. Romulus was the oldest and Nico was next, Romulus was 16 or 17 and Nico was a year or two younger. Nico looked very much like our Ed. And Romulus looked a lot like our Jason, very handsome and tall that's why he had one wife then Isa, his second wife, who was only one year older than I am.

So anyways, we lived in a beautiful home in Tabriz. The dining room was my favorite room and it had one, two, three, four, ... four windows from the top almost to the floor. And there was a sitting place by each. Then there were couches but ours were different, they would put a mattress on a wood thing and covered it with oriental rugs hug from the wall, then put pillows all over it. We also had chairs but that is the thing, see this was a dining room but we also used it as a living room. The living room was one step down and a small room. The dining room had a large table from end to end and you could have a lot of people... oh a hundred or more.

RFNL: You could fit a hundred people in your dining room?

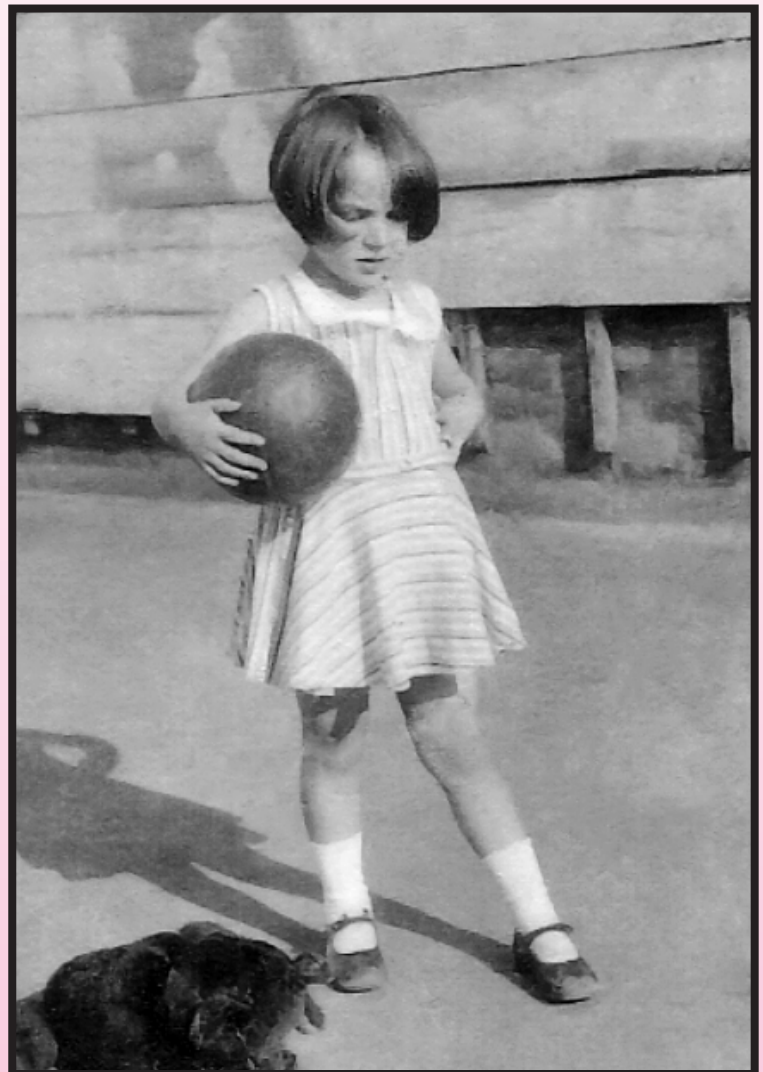
Edith: Yes, there was a balcony that went almost the entire length of the house. There were lots of rooms like an office for my dad, Romulus and his wife had a small suite with their own bathroom. Then my sister and I had a room, that's right! I did share a room with my sister. Then Dads room was huge, really big, it ran almost the whole length of the house. I don't remember if they had a fireplace or something else in his room but Ma Mood would come every morning with wood and start a fire because it was so cold there.

Oh yes we had another servant before Ma Mood but he wasn't very smart, he came to Dad and said he saw bad spirits in the house. You see, he was electrocuted in the kitchen because things were not as they are today. He would tell dad that these spirits would take him and move him and like that. So Dad thought it was time for this servant to leave and he was gone.

Let's see what else happened, oh yes, one time Ma Mood came to my mom and said that lady that came to clean the house was skinny when she got here but she is fat now.

RFNL: So did you think she was stealing things?

Edith: Yes, we asked her to take her skirt off and sure enough she had lots of thing but mostly she had food. My mother asked her why in the world she didn't just ask for things. She had taken sugar and flour and things that were not life and death to us but to her, with little babies, meant a lot. But anyways that was the end of her.



RFNL: So was your house as big as the house on Lyndon road?

Edith: Well it was different, it was big and it had a basement where Ma Mood lived. Later the house became a hospital. Oh! Here is a story, the house we stayed in, we were renting it, but we were told that an American had lost it in a game of poker.

RFNL: OK so where did you go to school?

Edith: There was a Sisters School that was also part of an orphanage. Dad wanted me to go there because the orphans there were taught French from the time they were very young and their accent was better. Dad wanted me to learn French the right way. That is the thing about Tabriz it was a business center and many languages were spoken there, Russian, Armenian, and so on.

RFNL: So after school what kind of games did you play?

Edith: We used to play "toop aribi", Arabian ball. It was like the baseball you play around here. You had a stick and you hit the ball then you run to places just like you have here. That's why I was wondering if base ball was really American or was it an Arab game that was copied. Let's see what else? Oh yes that jumping thing with squares.

RFNL: Do you mean hopscotch?

Edith: Yes, Hopscotch. But it was very difficult in that, well the first time you could jump with both feet. But the second time you had to do it with only one foot. You also had to hold a stone in the bent part of your other leg the whole time. If you dropped the stone you were out.

RFNL: Did you have a hobby?

Edith: Well mother did try to teach me knitting but I wasn't too thrilled with it. All though the entire time I was traveling to the United States I was knitting Frank a white, wool, sleeveless sweater, which was the style back then. And later what I did which was not very smart, I washed it with a load of white shirts, and when it came out it looked like a baby's sweater.

RFNL: Ok so now that you bring up Grandpa Frank, tell me about how you both met.

Edith: We met in Tehran, Mable Gout, my friend, had a birthday party which I attended. Frank was invited by a French friend who worked for him. Frank's friend had a sister that was also a friend of Mable so they all came to the party.

RFNL: So how old were you?

Edith: This was in December and I was still 17 but of course I would turn 18 in the next few weeks and Frank had just turned 24.

RFNL: Who introduced you to him?

Edith: All I know is that I was talking to a group of friends and Frank was looking at me, so when I turned around to look at him, he would look away real fast. Then after that we got to meet and spent the rest of the part together. He asked me if he could see me again and I told him the only place I could think of would be at the Catholic Church next Sunday. But he didn't come

so I thought he was not interested and forgot about him.

Then there was another party, this time for Maud the sister of Mable. I had heard from Mable that Frank was invited but that he only wanted to go if I was going to be there. At that time I was known as Lilica (sounds like Leleca), that's what everyone in Tabriz called me.

The name Edith was the idea of my brother Romulus, I'm not kidding! Can you believe it! At the time Romulus had read a book and he fell in love with the name Edith. So he asked my Dad if I could be named Edith and my Dad with all the names of the other kids said sure why don't we call her Edith. But when I was brought to be baptized the priest said we don't know of any saint that has the name Edith so they baptized me as Sophia Merica instead. But there was a saint Edith at the time it's just that the priest didn't know about her.

RFNL: So let's get back to the party, since you were going I assume Grandpa went too?

Edith: Yes but after that there was another party put on by his friend and that's when we got really close. His friend set us up in a room in the house, by ourselves, with a fireplace.

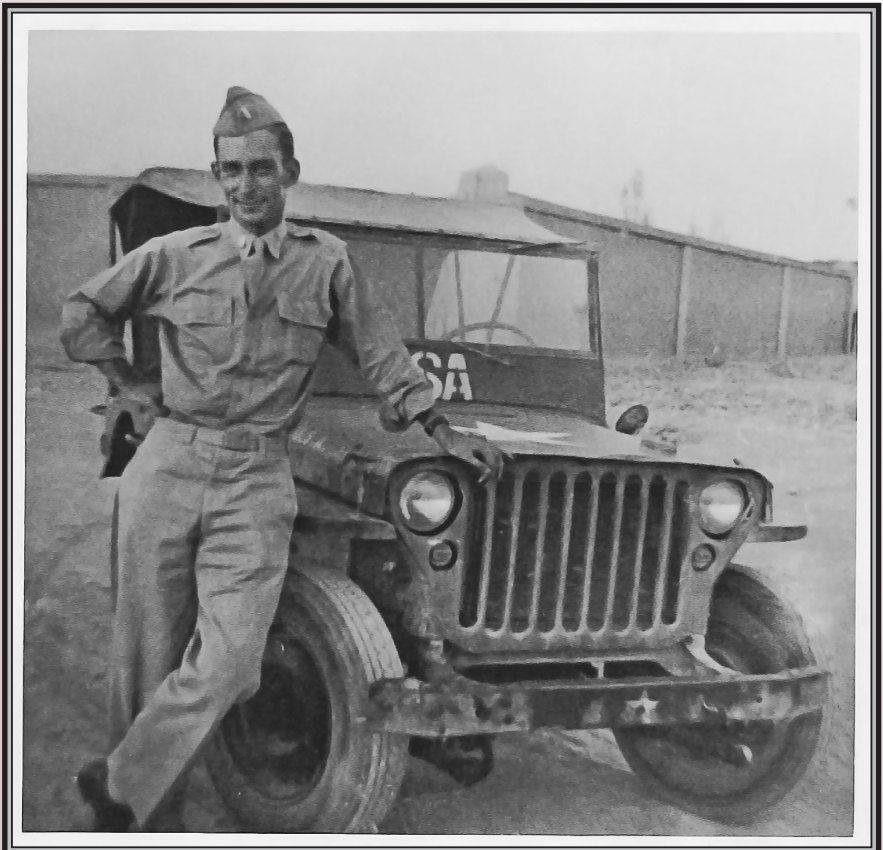
RFNL: Ohhhh I see

Edith: No it wasn't like, that I don't even think we even kissed. So after that day I asked my parents if it was OK to see him and they said it was alright to go to my brother Byron's home and play tennis.

RFNL: Was Byron born after Romulus?

Edith: No. Wait. First it was Romulus, then Nico, Michael, my sister, Byron then me, there were six of us.

RFNL: What was your sister's name?



Edith: Xanthippe

RFNL: Xanthippe (*sounds like Zanthepa*)? What? Did Romulus name her too?

Edith: No, Xanthippe was Socrates wife's name and my sister hated that name and changed it to Magdilyn. Poor child! Who would name their child with a name like that? My parents didn't have very good named for girls.

RFNL: Ok so you were both sitting at the fire place, did you kiss him? Come on Dad did you kiss her?

Edith: I don't remember.

Frank: I don't remember either.

RFNL: Did you hold hands?

Edith: Oh yes, then after that we would play tennis together or Frank would come to the house for supper.

RFNL: So who won? Who won at tennis?

Edith: I'm sure Frank did. All I knew about tennis was that we had a hall in the house at Tehran and I used to hit the ball against the wall.



Edith and Ophelia
(Byrons wife) Iran 1945

RFNL: Wait, you used to hit a tennis ball against the wall inside the house?

Edith: Yes, inside the house the wall was about 10' away and that is where I would hit the ball.

RFNL: Did your father like Frank?

Edith: Well, after a few months my brother moved back to Tabriz and my Father said why don't you follow him to live there for awhile? So I went to Tabriz and was shocked when Frank showed up. There was an Army Convoy going through Tabriz so Frank arrange to go along so he could see me. He told me

that he was going back to America and asked me to marry him.

RFNL: What? How old were you? How long had you known each other?

Edith: I think it was the fall after we had met so maybe six or seven or eight months. Anyways, he told me he wanted to marry me and I told him OK but he wanted to ask my Dad and I said don't ask Dad until I talk to my Mom.

RFNL: OK, one thing, did you at least kiss before he asked you to marry him?

Edith: Oh Yes! Anyways, Frank had to leave the next morning in his convoy and it was going to go right by my house. So I

stayed all night in the window to just make sure I would see him pass, but I fell asleep and never saw him.

Then I went home to Tehran to tell my mother who then told my father and he made me give Frank his ring back. It was his gold class ring from Citadel College, which he had attended. Richard now has that ring because he also went to the Citadel. My father said I was too young to get married so for the moment I had to give back the ring and see what happens.

RFNL: So what happened next?

Edith: So I told Frank that I don't care what my father says I am going to wait until he agrees to let us be married. So we started corresponding back and forth. I then took a trip with my mother, sister and Byron to Egypt because Byron had been called into service and that was where he was to join the Navy. I remember writing Frank how beautiful Cairo and Alexandria were and how I wished he could be there with me.

Frank's letter were not what you would call love letters and were very non-committal, so my letters back became the same. But I loved him very much and I used to pray every day that things would work out. Thank God it finally did! Do you know I had to wait almost two years to get all my paper work together? I got my passport right away. But it took forever to get my visa to America.

RFNL: So let me get this straight, after you gave him back his ring you never saw him again until you came to the US?

Edith: Yes, he left, how could I see him? That's why he asked me to marry him so he could take me to the United States.

RFNL: I see, so how long was it between the time he left and the time you two saw each other again?

Edith: I think it was about two years.

RFNL: OK so now let's talk about the trip to America.

Edith: I went to Alexandria to leave for America but the man there told me I had to go back to Cairo to get my paperwork signed. So I went to the US consulate in Cairo and got someone out of bed on a Sunday morning to sign my visa. He came to the door in his pajamas and I didn't think much of it at the time, but later I thought what a strange thing for him to do. But I was scheduled to leave on Monday so, you see, I couldn't wait.

I didn't find out until the last minute if I would be able to leave on the SS Vulcania because there might not be enough room. But there was plenty of room except that when we stopped in Italy, the ship filled up with a lot of war brides like me.

RFNL: Did you have your own room aboard ship?

Edith: No I shared a room with another lady from New York. I don't remember her name but she was a very important person like a director or something.

RFNL: So what was the trip like?

Edith: First we went to Naples and we had to stay for a while due to some mechanical trouble. They told us we could go to Rome if we like, but if we were not back in time the ship would leave without us. So I just stayed on board and worked on Frank's sweater or walked around Naples.

RFNL: Did you go by yourself?

Edith: Oh no! There was a tour and we went in a group. I never went by myself. We went to that place, you know, where they have all the persons captured in the volcano?

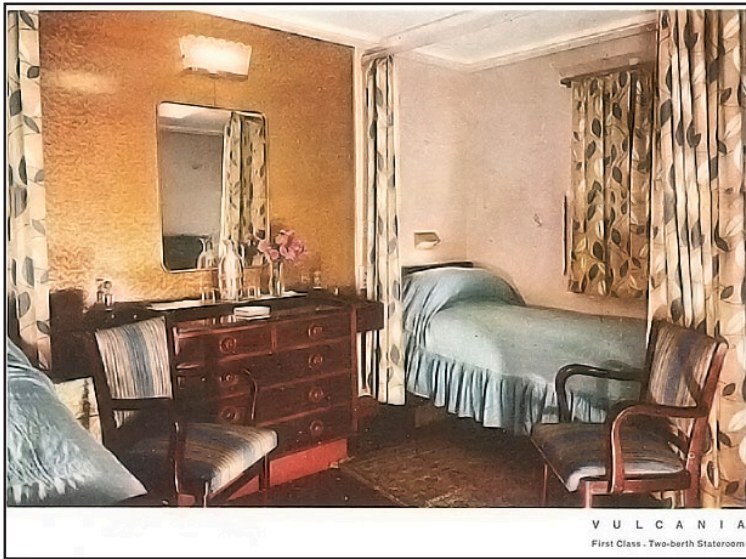
RFNL: Pompeii?

Edith: Yes Pompeii, yes it was very interesting with the people all frozen as if they were just doing natural things like cutting food up.

RFNL: So once you left Naples where did you go next?

Edith: Once we left Naples, we went all the way to New York. I remember the first thing I saw was the beautiful blue dome of a building on an island that I later learned was Ellis Island. And I was very impressed thinking what a beautiful place!

RFNL: Little did you know that soon you would be staying there. But before we get there let's go back to your trip across the Atlantic. What did you do on the ship?



Edith: For me there really wasn't very much to do so I used to go to bed early. I used to go and watch people dance or swim; you know I gained a lot of weight on that trip. There was a lot of food and not a lot to do; my roommate was older than me so we didn't do much together.

RFNL: How big was your room?

Edith: The room was very nice and we had our own balcony along with a private bathroom.

RFNL: It looks like your father really took care of all your needs.

Edith: Yes, my father took care of everything, once I got to Alexandria there was this man my father paid to take care of all the arrangements.

RFNL: How did you get to Alexandria?

Edith: My father had arranged for me to fly on a military plane from Tehran to Iraq where I stayed overnight. I was so scared being there all by myself. Then the next day I got on a plane to Cairo then onto Alexandria. The trip was very unpleasant because I just kept remembering my father crying as I left mom

and dad at the airport.

RFNL: Did you ever see them again?

Edith: Yes, I went back to see them right after the twins were born. Poor Frank, he had to take a vacation from work just to stay home and watch the kids while I went back to see my family.

RFNL: Dad you used your vacation to babysit us kids? No wonder you called us rotten little kids!

Frank: Right!

RFNL: Going back to your trip to America, tell me what you brought over with you.

Edith: There was this square box that father had made special for my silverware. It was very strong and very hard to get open. I was very lucky in that I never lost anything the whole trip. It is true that I was very careful and always made sure that I gave my belongings to only the very important people.

RFNL: Did you bring any money with you?

Edith: Yes, I had a \$1,000 dollar bill that my father gave to me. Editor's note: \$1,000 dollars in 1946 is the equivalent of \$11,500 in 2010 dollars.

RFNL: A \$1,000 dollars! Where did you keep it?

Frank: Yes a one thousand dollar bill.

Edith: I kept it in my purse. When I got to New York, my father's friend took me to one of the larger banks in town to deposit my money. When I gave the banker fellow the bill, he told me that he had been in banking for a very long time and had never seen a \$1,000 dollar bill.

RFNL: OK so you're in New York, when was the first time you saw Dad in the United States?

Edith: I wanted to surprise him...

RFNL: Dad, you didn't know she was coming?

Frank: I knew roughly but I didn't know for sure she was on the Vulcania until later and by that time the ship was already there.

Edith: So anyways, I went to Dubuque Iowa by train. I remember I had a top bed in the train.

RFNL: Why Dubuque?

Edith: I was to attend Dubuque University. Back in Tehran my English teacher, Pearl Williams, was from Dubuque University so that is where my father decided I should go.

RFNL: So after you got there what happened?

Edith: I called Frank and told him I was here and he drove up from Purdue University to see me. Here is the funny part, when I took the phone and talked to the fellow I said this is Miss Merica and he said Miss America? I said NO, Miss Merica! He was teasing me all along but I didn't know anything about a Miss America.

RFNL: Who was this? Someone at Purdue?

Edith: No it was the operator, at that time you always had to ask the operator to dial for you.



Edith Merica - Fremont Ohio 1946

RFNL: OK then who answered the phone at Perdue?

Edith: Frank did, he had a phone in his room at the dorm.

RFNL: Then what happened? Was he surprised to hear that you were here?

Edith: No, he knew I was coming. He knew for two years, it just took a long time. When I went to the consulate in Tehran and the fellow there told me it would take another year before I would be allowed to go to the United States I was heartbroken. I went home, I was so pale that I just went to my room and mother called dad and when he saw me so pale and upset he got my visa arranged in just one week.

RFNL: Let me ask a question, do you think... maybe your dad was also holding up your visa?

Edith: I think so, Dad didn't want me to go, but after he saw me... one week and I was ready to go.

RFNL: So Dad the first time you saw here in the United States was that in Dubuque?

Frank: Yes, I drove my car up to see her.

Edith: Yes, my Father did not want me to go to Purdue where Frank was going to school and like I said, he knew of this school from my English teacher back home. She was a minister from Dubuque.

RFNL: Now if I remember right you were supposed to go to

school for about a year before you got married, am I correct?

Edith: Yes but immediately, or a month or two, I wrote to Dad to tell him I was getting married and asked for his blessing, which he finally gave.

RFNL: OK so Dad drives up to see you, do you remember what kind of car he had?

Edith: Oh yes, he had a little Chevrolet with a very little back seat area. To go back there you really had to jump over the seat.

RFNL: Wait a minute, how do you know? Did you get in the back seat with Dad?

Frank: Dad just smiled and didn't say anything

Edith: Maybe, I don't know, maybe just put the seat down.

RFNL: What! You put the seat down?!

Edith: Well, yes but nothing serious, you know. Well the policeman once told us to move along.

RFNL: The policeman? So you were parking?

Edith: Yes we were parking, you know like a lover's lane or something like that.

RFNL: OK, on that revelation I think we will stop and pick this up again sometime in the future.

Edith: Good Idea!



Edna Southham Riel (Frank's Mother) Frank and Edith Riel
Fremont, Ohio 1947

FAMILY SHORTS



Alan has picked up another dog that is now named JD, short for Junkyard Dog. He adopted JD from a rescue center to provide a new buddy for his other dog, a black lab named Cisco



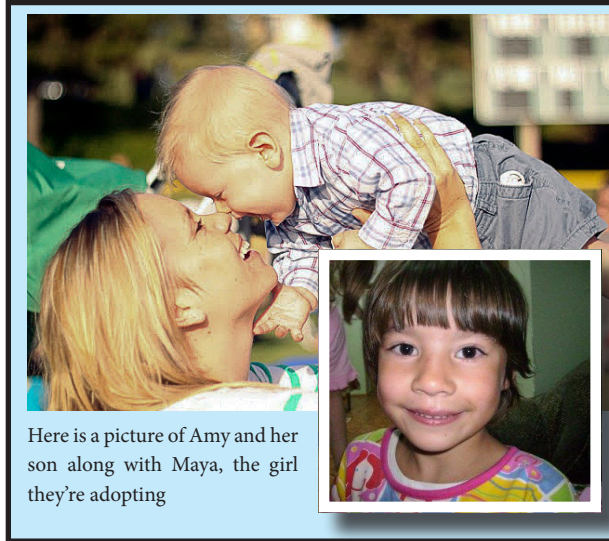
Robert and Karla's long time (12 years) family dog, Maggie, had to be put to sleep at the end of January. She suffered a broken, hind leg and due to her current hip dysplasia was not likely to ever heal. She joins our other dog May in doggie heaven and right now is eating all the prime rib bones from those Riel bowls of the past.



Bruce reports on surgery to relieve pressure to his eyes Surgery on Saturday morning January 21st was a piece of cake it only took 5 hours to do both eyes. I came home on Sunday evening. Hurts like hell...no complications. I can't see very well for now, blurry and VERY double in all directions including straight. They cut out three walls of the right eye socket in the skull and two walls of the left eye socket. I am hopeful that in a week or two I will be back at work. Birdy is taking very good care of me, I couldn't ask for a better nurse. Btw... typing this is really hard when you can't see.



Lauren took Holden to a farm near Danville, California where he got to meet Danny the horse, some baby lambs and an alpaca! Both he and mom had a great time. The question is when will they get a horse of their own? Come-on Dustin, you could build a nice horse barn somewhere!



Here is a picture of Amy and her son along with Maya, the girl they're adopting

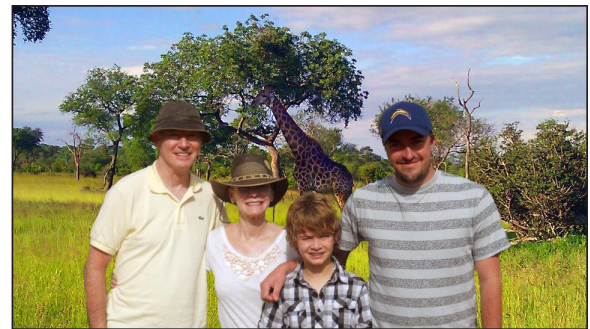
I have a longtime friend named Amy, who I met on the first day of Kindergarten. She now is married and has a baby boy. They are an amazing family, and they are people that will help out other people in any way they can. She and her husband have made the decision to adopt a daughter from Russia. The adoption fees are incredible, so they're trying to raise some money from friends to help out. I thought this would be a nice thing for our family to do.

Megan Riel Mehan

Here's a link to her blog: <http://www.tinygreenelephants.com/>

And the donation site: <http://reecesrainbow.org/?s=maya&x=0&y=0>

Margaret recently spent some time in Florida on a business trip. As you can see it was a very intense program where the participants were subjected to all kinds of adversity. Margaret tells us that despite the rigorous schedule of events, she was able to take a break, on an occasion or two, for a little fun.



David Gillingham spent his holiday vacation taking an African safari as a guest of long time family friends, Jim, Laura and Collin Fitzpatrick. They stayed in a bungalow right on the edge of the African savanna. During his trip he saw, live and up close, elephants, rhinoceroses, water buffalos, giraffes, leopards, hyenas, lions, and many other animals of the Sabi Sands Game Reserve. He has posted all his pictures on Facebook, be sure to check them out!

Continuing a family tradition of the gift of travel for Christmas, Bud, Margaret, Megan, Ashley and Michael journeyed to the island of Bonaire for the Winter Holiday. While located off the coast of Venezuela, Bonaire is one of three islands known as the "Dutch Antilles" controlled by The Netherlands. Aruba and Curacao are better known and more developed for tourism, leaving Bonaire as a divers' paradise. Extensive and well-protected reefs, easily accessible from the shore, line the length of the island. Only nine miles from the equator, both the water and air are



Happy Holidays From Bonaire



warm and inviting. Bonaire's lack of high rise hotels, and the absence of multinational chains helps to make the many isolated and beautiful diving spots a rare treasure. Megan, the family's designated tour guide, knows dive spots.

Our quaint hotel, "Buddy's Dive Shop" was right on the water's edge and is highly responsive to the needs of divers. The hotel package included a three bedroom apartment, a jeep, and drive-in service for picking up unlimited number of air tanks. A



complete and hearty breakfast was included overlooking the Caribbean Sea. Eating could have been an all day thing, but there was diving to do. Each day Megan had mapped out three dives for her, Michael, and Ashley. Bud and Margaret engaged in less adventuresome but equally beautiful snorkeling often in sites near where "the kids" went diving. On one of the days, Michael helped Margaret figure out how to dive to the bottom while snorkeling and a few times she managed the shift to his second regulator making it possible for her to stay underwater longer. But without weights, she would gradually drift up to the surface.

The next day the kids decided it was time for Margaret to go a bit deeper. Margaret borrowed Ashley's gear and was given expert and considerate diving instruction by Michael and Megan. After some experimentation with the gear, Megan told her there was only really one thing she needed to remember and she would be ready..."Don't panic." That was easy enough. Michael took the camera and Megan took Margaret down the side of the reef into deeper regions. It was a great reversal of time. Margaret (the kid) held tightly onto Megan's hand while Megan (the parent) managed buoyancy, direction, and gauges. Margaret only had to manage breathing while the kids lead her on a tour of the world they love to explore. Margaret was able to experience the joy of weightlessness underwater and the unparalleled beauty of wildlife on the reef.

Megan is getting to be quite an accomplished underwater photographer. But on this trip, she had a playful challenge. Megan carried a pocket size warrior composed of aluminum foil that she and her new friend, Justin, had created at a party. Megan photographed him in a variety of

places--diving in the water, at the bar, on the beach, climbing the Christmas tree, etc. Each night she disappeared to the one computer at the hotel that had internet connection to share her artwork of the day. On the



last day of the trip, when diving is not possible if you want to fly out, the crew visited the island's wild donkey preserve. Donkeys roam the island, but if they get hurt or need protection, they are moved to the preserve. Having purchased a bag full of carrots, the wild donkeys accepted all of us as their new best friends. Christmas day we flew home wrapped with memories of great trip.

