

It's a Riel Easter!



Easter Party and Egg Hunt at the Keith's Home



April brings us showers, or so the song tells us but so far this month, all we have had is great weather. That was especially true for this year's Riel Easter Celebration which was held at Seamus and Kristy's home. The sun was out and there was a very refreshing breeze blowing up the canyon at the back of their home.

For many in the family it was the first time they had a chance to see the Keiths' home. It is a splendid multi-level home perched on the edge of a canyon in

has plenty of room both inside and out. The backyard has three different levels; the top has a large deck overlooking the rest of the property and also a built-in BBQ area. The second level is the kid play zone and has lots of things for the kids to climb and jump on. The last level is, as of yet, still undeveloped but we heard talks of a swimming pool being a possibility.

They have a beautiful kitchen that looks out to the back yard and is conveniently close to both

the family room and the dining room. Most of us have heard about sunken living rooms, well theirs is a raised room. It provides a nice break from the family and dining rooms. Although we're told that it takes some time for the kids to get used to navigating the steps.

Speaking of kids this was also a good time for all the family to finally meet Riley. Cousin Katy spent a good portion of the day holding him and rocking him to sleep.





Both Liam and Braden spent most of the day playing in the back yard with Cousin Noah.

The party started around 11:00 with everyone bringing their own lunch and drinks. Additionally, snacks and goodies were brought to share with everyone (the Keith's now have enough chips to last them until Labor Day).





Katy made some Easter basket cupcakes that were very tasty as well as being very skillfully decorated.

We all ate out on the deck where two large tables were set up with a large shade umbrella protecting us from the sun. As usual, there was the catching up on everyone conversations going on between bites of food. Never let it be said that a Riel can't talk and eat at the same time!

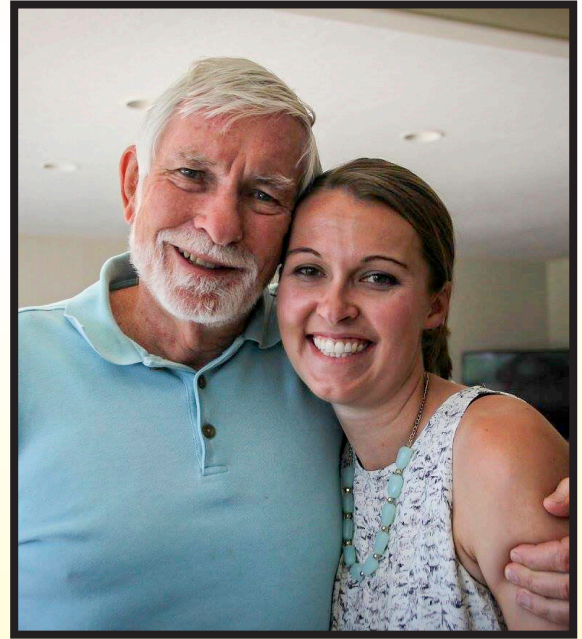




After lunch there was an Easter egg hunt for the kids held in the play area one level below. While many of the adults chose to watch from the railing of the deck above, many others joined in on the fun including the Riel Papparazzi. Truth be told, there were more cameras than kids looking for eggs! But after all this was the first official egg hunt for the next generation of kids so what else would you expect?

After all the eggs were found and some explaining as to why they were looking for them in the first place, it was back to the top level for dessert and more talk that has become the tradition at these events, it was time for some family pictures.

This was a great event and everyone had a wonderful time. This also marks the first time a third generation kid has hosted a Riel event. We thank Seamus and Kristy for allowing us be part of their Easter celebration.



What it means to be the “sick guy”

By Bruce Hartman



Recently, over dinner, Matthew and I were discussing different ideas for him to write an RFNL article. Coming up with a topic seems to be his biggest obstacle, not so much finding the time to actually write something. We hit on a multitude of ideas but nothing really got him excited. Out of nowhere Matt suggested the idea of writing about what it is to be autistic. I was very keen on that idea and I really hope he follows through with it. That then got me thinking... Although not nearly as interesting as a sixteen year old autistic kids perspective on what it means to be autistic, I thought I would take a shot at giving my perspective on what it is to be the “sick guy.”

I will preface it by stating the obvious...being sick SUCKS... but I think that goes without saying! Over the past ten years there has been a lot of quiet planning on my part in anticipation of declining health and adjusting to the changes in my life. The writing was on the wall even back then, we just didn't know how fast or slowly the disease would progress. Selling our Mt Helix home and moving into our single level home was the first and biggest change to our life plan. I had to make that happen while I was still able to do things for

myself despite the fact that Birdy wasn't completely enamored with the idea. We remodeled our current home and in doing so widened doorways and hallways with a wheelchair in mind, installed handicapped grab bars in the shower and toilets that are 2" taller than the norm for accessibility as well as hard floors that allow wheels to roll. I never wanted it to look like a “rest home” but the clock is / was ticking on my decline and at the same time wanted to make a home that looked nice...all without scaring Birdy any more than she was already scared.

Once the house was taken care of I tried many different things / hobbies in an attempt to stay moving and in hopes of keeping the disease at bay if only for a time; Golf was short lived (I wasn't any good at it but I sure enjoyed it)...when a swing that dug a little deep into the turf tore my bicep muscle nearly in half the doctor explained that my muscles no longer have elasticity and can't recover from those sort of things as a result of the disease. Bicycle riding with Birdy on our beach cruiser tandem was a blast for a while but after the blood clots in my lungs and the congestive heart failure worsened I couldn't load the bike into the truck much less ride the damned thing. Shooting was another thing I really enjoyed but has become difficult. I shake so bad holding the gun(s) it is hard to hit anything with any accuracy. Even cooking, which I truly enjoy, has become very challenging as a result of the pain in my back and legs. Going to the grocery store takes serious commitment even to pick up just a few things. Hell, for that matter, taking a shower takes planning and pretty well wipes me out for a time. I know...what a wuss! Right?

None of this is meant to sound like whining, In fact whiners piss me off! I do what I can and then push myself to do more. That “more” is becoming less and less but WTF it's my personal best! I go to work every day because it forces me to face the day no matter how crappy I feel. One of the toughest questions I get asked on

a regular basis is “How do you feel?” Or a variant on that question; “How are you doing?” This is always asked with the best of intentions but I find it tremendously difficult to answer. The problem is that the real answer is something people do not want to hear. The reality is that every day is bad and some days are worse. Every day the disease worsens and there is no hope for improvement. I understand the disease well but very few others do. This particular Myopathy is extremely debilitating and there is no known treatment...probably the most hopeless prognosis one can receive. I am in a good place with this emotionally and I am able to keep it all in the right perspective. There are really only four people in my life that seem to truly understand me and my matter-of-fact ways of dealing with this disease and the knowledge that there is no chance for improvement:

Craig probably gets me the most... he has perfected a balance of stepping in to help while making fun of me all at the same time. He allows me to do as much as I can do regardless of the consequences I will suffer later. Then, when I fall on my face, he just pushes me out of the way and says something warm and loving like: “Get out of the way old man” and takes things right out of my hand just like I used to do to him as a kid trying to help me... maybe it is just revenge!

Birdy understands me all too well but it kills her to watch me struggle. She holds out hope that when she asks “how do you feel?” that I’ll surprise her with a happy answer like “awesome.” I truly believe this disease is harder on her than it is on me. Sometimes I have to remind her to back off and let me do things even though we both know there will be consequences and a heavy price to pay either in pain or the inability to walk for a day or two etc.

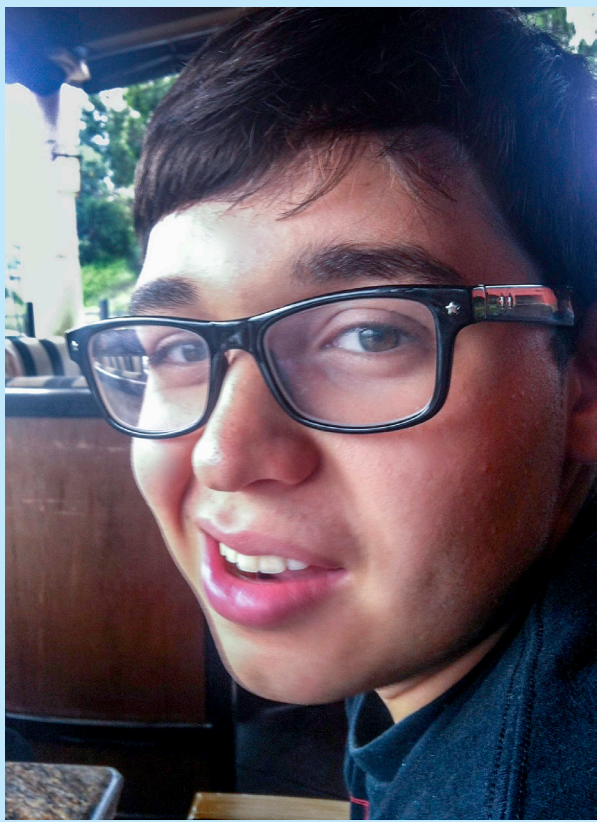
Annie somehow has figured me out...She isn’t as willing to make fun of me as Craig (but who is?) but she isn’t rattled easily and never allows me to get anywhere near the pitty-pot. She has a way of making me feel normal rather than like the sick guy... I love that about her...

The only other person that truly seems to understand how I’m wired is Megan Rehwald. She, like Craig, has figured out the balance. She gives me crap and won’t stand for any poor me or whining... (Not that I go there) while at the same time she is genuinely concerned with how I’m doing. It’s weird...she just gets me! I always walk away with a smile after engaging her! Maybe that’s why she is a successful headshrinker...she knows how to connect even with old guys!

There are head trips to being the sick guy. It isn’t always a stiff upper lip. I get a pretty big lump in my throat from time to time when I start thinking about Birdy, my kids and grandkids. Knowing I’m missing out on a lot and possibly not going to be around as long as I’d like has a tendency to screw with one's head. Life sucks totally from the sidelines! Being a spectator in life rather than a participant is not always an easy pill to swallow and it is often hard to make people understand that I just want a little normal back in my life even though trying to do normal often has consequences. Travel, for in-stance, is a bitch but I want to do it...Our last trip to Europe damned near killed me, but I’d do it again... and I’m still paying for that trip (and I don’t mean financially). Often I’m willing to throw a good decision to the wind for a moment of normalcy...a tradeoff worth taking at times. I get a lot of “I told you so” from Birdy but I am good with that.

I suppose I can sum it all up the same way I started it...Being sick SUCKS! But it is what the good Lord gave me!





In honor of World Autism Day, I'm sharing our "face of autism". Matthew is so much more than autism, but so much because of his autism. I know autism can be scary, but in our house we do not attach negativity with the word. To us, autism means different and we celebrate diversity. We all fly our freak flags with pride. Matthew is writing an article for a family newsletter about himself and he wrote "I am proud of having autism, there is nothing to be ashamed of. Autism is something that defines me as a person, it helps me learn that change is important because it shapes who you are. I hope to become a person that can change for the better." That kind of self-awareness is astounding, especially at 16. I know that he can and will achieve so much, not only despite his autism but in large part BECAUSE of his autism. This kid is beyond brave, don't underestimate him.

Ana Hartboleda

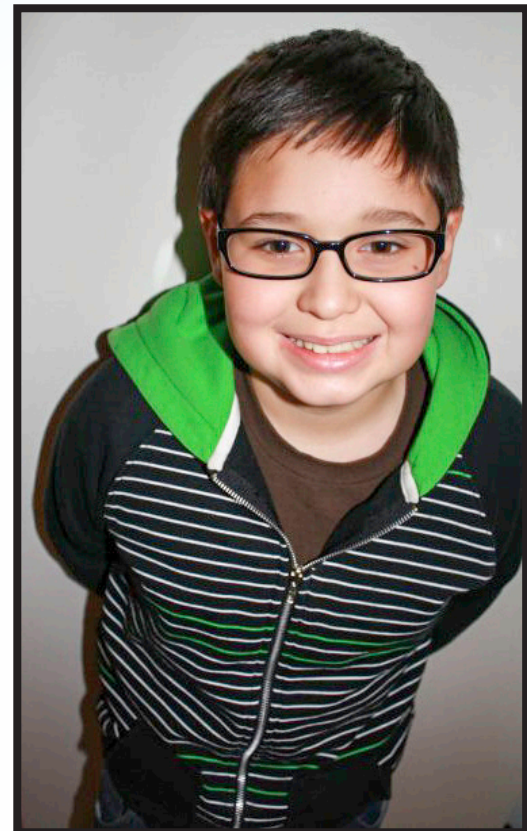
Being Autistic

By: Matthew Hartman

My mind is not particularly like yours. That statement is true for everyone, except mine is quite different because I was born with Autism. Autism is neurological disorder that inhibits me from having "normal" social interactions with others. I see my autism as a personality trait; I can focus and persevere on goals that I want to accomplish for myself. I stumble with having low communication skills and have a difficulty in understanding other people's emotions. I think my autism is neither a strength nor a weakness, but makes me have flaws like everyone else. I want to focus on how my autism affects these struggles and how I am trying to change them to improve myself as a person.

The problem I always seem to encounter is communicating and interacting with others. I have learned that I tend to turn the conversation about myself, only focusing on topics that interest me. I seem to forget that in a conversation your goal is to find a topic that you and the other person have in common. It makes me feel annoyed at myself when I realize that I am focusing the conversation around my interests, as I think it is quite narcissistic. I have been trying to find ways to help improve my social skills. I have started asking people more about their career and family life. I hope this method will allow me to become more open and interact better with others.

My poor communication skills may be part of the reason why I struggle to identify other's emotions. Facial recognition is very difficult for me to comprehend. There are times where I do not notice that the person seems annoyed or angry at me. Only when I see a drastic change in the tone of their voice or they tell me that they are upset. I later feel bad and

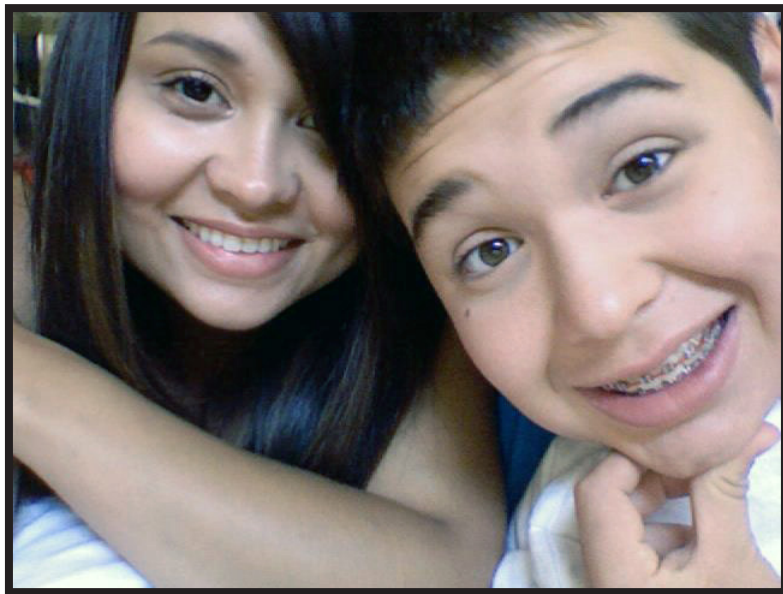




I apologize to that person. I also notice that I do not take notice when someone does not want me to be around them. I will usually follow them around and start asking them why they are upset at me. The person may get mad and yell at me to leave them alone. I later realized that I made the person really upset. I want to work on improving my understanding of people's facial cues so I can tell how that person is feeling. There are also times where I miss when someone is feeling down or they are angry at me. I want to improve that by looking at people's faces and listening to their tone.

Despite having flaws from my autism, I have some strength that I benefit from having autism. My autism helped me realize that being myself is what matters. I think this philosophy helped me build my self esteem and be myself around others. Teenagers at this age feel that they have to be like everyone else. However, it is always important to be who you are and find your own good qualities. I don't have a lot of friends but I am happy to have friends that respect and appreciate who I am.

Writing is one of my favorite activities. I always like to create my own stories. Writing has helped me express



myself on paper when I find trouble expressing myself verbally. Sometimes my stories can be complex and confusing but I find some of my stories are really good. They are not perfect; they may have lots of grammar, character, plot, writing structure, etc. issues. I experience these mistakes and learn I need to improve them but I keep in mind that over time and with practice I will soon get better. My writing will grow as I continue to work on it. I hope with revisions, edits, and proof-reading I will be able to write a well polished story.



Autism is part of my personality. Without it I would not be the same person I am today. There are obstacles that I need to overcome but with my understanding of these obstacles, it will make it much easier for me to improve upon them. Autism allows me to look at the world with a different point of view. Everyone has struggles that can be overcome with commitment and perseverance. The important part of overcoming struggles is learning about yourself as a person and what you can do to become a better person. Autism has also given me a sense of being myself and to use grit in tough school assignments. Writing has also helped express my imagination into words. Overall, I am proud of having autism. There is nothing to be ashamed of. Autism is something that defines me as a person; it helps me learn that change is important because it shapes who you are. I hope to become a person that can change for the better.





Saint Bob Strikes Again!

By Bruce Hartman

A typical Sunday morning at the Birdy and Bruce home starts early. Bird gets up around 4'ish and I generally sleep in until 5'ish and sometimes as late as 6:00.

Most Sunday's Craig comes over with two or sometimes three kids around 7:30 or 8:00. This gives Ana a much deserved and welcomed opportunity to sleep in; and Birdy and I really look forward to the happy chaos it brings into our otherwise quiet house. I try to bake something fresh or, at a minimum, have pancakes and fresh fruit ready to go. That Josie can eat and there is nothing better than to feed and spoil hungry, happy grandkids.

On many of these Sundays, I (selfishly), have a small project or two that Craig the "Saint" takes care of for me. A light bulb, batteries in smoke detectors, drawer not working right...the dumb stuff I used to fix but now find extremely challenging as this damned disease slowly robs me of my ability to do this stuff.

This past weekend I was headed to the hospital for my monthly, five day IVIG infusions, so I was going to miss seeing Craig and the kids. I still had a project I was going to ask Craig to do which was to "overhaul" one of the toilets in the house. This was a larger than usual request and involved pulling the tank off the toilet to replace the flush valve. I also wanted the water fill valve replaced and install a bidet and a new seat...certainly a tall order and something I knew would take an hour or more even for a handy guy that works with tools every day. I left a note so Birdy wouldn't have to try to remember anything technical and I also detailed where all the parts could be found. Craig had already done this to the two other toilets in the house so they won't need to be done again for another ten years or so.

After I left around 7am and Birdy decided to scrounge up all the parts and had them in a pile on the kitchen counter in anticipation of Craig's arrival. Shortly after that Craig called to say both he and Josie were sick and he was not going to come over. Birdy was sad but understanding... She really looks forward to spending time with Craig and especially those precious grandkids!

Since Birdy was now going to go to her classroom for a few hours to work in lieu of something fun with grandkids, Bob stopped by the house to drop off something for her to transport to school (remember Bob rides a bicycle to work). He noticed the pile of toilet parts on the counter and inquired as to the plan for their use. When the Bird explained how the morning had fallen apart Bob offered to take on the project in Craig's absence.

Well, as most projects that involve plumbing go... Bob went into this with the expectation that he would make quick work of it and get back to his day. It never happens that way. Right off the bat he encountered a frozen bolt. This, in and of itself, should not have been much more than a speed bump except that my hacksaw was nowhere to be found. First trip to Home Depot... purchase a hacksaw. ...No biggie, back on track! Removed the tank, replaced the hardware and back together it goes... Piece of cake!

Next is the new seat and the bidet. Upon close examination of the included parts he found that the hose connection that came with the kit was not compatible with the valve sticking out of my wall...Surprise, Surprise... Second trip to Home Depot! Upon his return this time he was able to complete the "toilet overhaul" but my little project had certainly impacted his day. There goes three hours of Bob's life that he will never get back! I bet he will think twice before he offers to take on one my little "Craig projects!" He probably wishes he just drove to Francis Parker himself to drop off his stuff.

But the reality is that he would do it again in a heartbeat and I know that about Bob. I can't begin to tell you how good a friend Bob is to me and how much I appreciate that friendship. Saint Bob strikes again...Thank you, Bob!

FAMILY SHORTS



I witnessed a rather extraordinary display of affection for Listy recently as the high school basketball season wore on...

The backstory is that Listy is much revered for attending virtually all of the games and events at her school (and there are many). You would think that high school students would be somewhat jaded, but they always get so excited when they see her, and they're always most appreciative.

So, one evening, I'm standing in the sweaty Serra High School gym watching a game between Serra and Patrick Henry, and a sign appeared with Listy's photo and the words, "Listy, come home." Though she hadn't been at Serra, many of her students from De Portola had matriculated there.

The next time the two teams met at Henry, the PH kids began yelling, "This is LISTY's house," over and over. I was stunned. However, not to be outdone, and in the spirit of great high school rivalries everywhere, the Serra kids began shouting, "Listy loves US." Finally, and with amazing efficiency, student leaders swiftly inspired all of the Patrick Henry side to shout, "Listy chose US!"



I still get tingles up my spine remembering the moment, and I'll bet you that in all recorded high-school history, this has never happened before. Also, Listy placed second among all 55-59 women and seventh of all 55-59 year olds, including men, roughly 60 people, in the Finish Chelsea's Run.

Bob Gillingham

Corbin is ready for his next article. We were sitting at lunch and he decided to write on piece of paper about being 5. First I wrote it as he spelled it and then I translated it.

Being 5

I git to eet isce cream. I git to git to git a closr look at lemurs beucus there is a lemur wok at the wild animal pork. But the best thing ubat being 5 is I git to go to a pla dat with my frens.

Corbin age 5 April 12 2015


Being 5

I get to eat ice cream. I get to get to get a closer look at lemurs because there is a lemur walk at the Wild Animal Park. But the best thing about being 5 is I get to go to a play date with my friends.

Corbin age 5 April 12 2015



Jeff Benesch – Chair's Award



Jeff Benesch comes from a large Chicago family of Democrats who nurtured his progressive idealism. He began his political activism by engaging in anti-war protests while a student at UCLA. Later Jeff moved to San Diego, raised a family, and then returned to political action with the election of George Bush in 2000, the invasion of Iraq, and the demise of KLSD Radio.

Jeff spent weekends joining fellow activists holding anti-war and "Impeach Bush" signs around La Mesa. He also joined a group of protesters who would attach signs to fences on freeway overpasses throughout San Diego. The crowning achievement of this group was the "borrowing" of a large blank billboard near the stadium, which the group adorned with the phrases "No More War" and "Yes We Can." Jeff traveled to Nevada twice to volunteer with the Obama campaign.

When Progressive Talk Station KLSD was threatened with extinction by Clear Channel, Jeff joined the Save KLSD movement, an effort that linked many like-minded Democratic activists in the county. Jeff sat on the Campaign for Press Reform committee for several years in an attempt to bring progressive voices back to the San Diego airwaves.

Jeff is a member of the La Mesa Foothills Democratic Club and serves on its Executive Board as the Vice President of Programming, tasked with bringing the best and the brightest to speak to the club membership every month. He also works with the GO team as a Precinct Leader in San Carlos.

Jeff is most proud of his wife and his three adult children, and he cherishes the moments he gets to spend with his six grandchildren.