

R F N I

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Madeline Frances Benesch

Joins Our Expanding Family

By Jeff Benesch

Lucky #7 came our way last Saturday, March 5th, when beautiful Madeline Frances Benesch made her debut at 8:38 AM at Sharp Grossmont Hospital! (She is the 18th member of this generation).

Weighing in at a robust 7 lbs., 7 oz., and 20 ½" long, Maddie decided enough was enough, and made her way quickly into the outside world. She joins cousin Sofia as the only girls in a stable full of male grandkids. Score now reads Boys 5, Girls 2. But the girls definitely have the cuteness quotient!



Mom Chavva and Dad Jason are already home and settling in with Madeline, brother Noah, who couldn't be prouder of his new sis, and I'm sure Linus and Lucy will "tolerate" Madeline just fine like they do with her rough-housing big brother.

Chavva started feeling something was happening when she awoke about 3:30 AM Saturday with contractions, but decided to wait a few hours to wake Jason.

Jason found time for breakfast and a shower, and they both waited for Grama Carol to arrive to sit with Noah while they trekked over to the birthing center at Grossmont. Carol arrives around 7-ish, and Chavva thinks they better get going FAST. Like right now, Jason!!!

Well, they barely got her out of the car, and into her room, no time for an epidural, lets depend on the house OB, and BOOM, sweet little Maddie appears an hour later! Now that's fast! Fortunately for all concerned, sister Rachel was there for guidance and support, Jason was a keen observer, and there were no glitches in the delivery. Slam, bam, thank you ma'am!

You can see from the pictures, she is a beautiful little thing, with long concert pianist fingers,



drinks like a champ, is a good sleeper already, and adjusting rapidly to a house full of joyful noise and an occasional bark or two. All 4 grandparents are loving the time spent with and holding our little princess.

On a side note, Carol and I have zoomed into the grandchild lead, for the time being anyway! Who's Next?!





Has Sprung !!!



OK, so the major rains that we were promised last winter really didn't materialize. El Nino, after December, was in fact, El No show. But the good news is that the rain we did get in December and the storm that went through on Friday the 11th, did a lot of good for the spring bloom in Borrego Springs.

Karla and I spent the weekend camping out at the Agua Caliente Regional Park last February with some friends of ours Jim and Lorelee. We try to make this camping trip every year, but last year we all went to Europe instead. So this year, we had to make up for it by going twice! Yes, that's right twice! We will be going out next weekend starting on Friday the 18th, but this time we will be staying at the Palm Canyon Hotel & RV Resort.

For those of you who are not familiar with the spring bloom, it starts in or about February (could be sooner or later) and ends around late March. I wish I could be more specific but Mother Nature has her own time table and we just have to guess at it. It has been my experience that the bloom works its way from the South to the North (with some exceptions). But the more water an area gets the earlier and longer the bloom.



The best way to tell if the flowers are out is to visit the Anza Borrego Springs Natural History Association's website (<http://www.abdnha.org/pages/03flora/reports/current.htm>) and get their report. As of right now the ground flowers are blooming and probably will last until we get there this Friday maybe even a bit longer. If you catch it just right, you will see a carpet of small (quarter to dime size) flowers of yellow, purple and white along the desert floor. But catching it like that is a very rare occurrence because many years it just never fully materializes.

It is easy to be caught up in the “wildflowers are blooming” hysteria that some of our local news outlets report, only to be vastly disappointed once you get out there. We have been going out for several years now and only once have we seen the explosion of flowers you so often hear about. I have high hopes that this year will be a good one (look at the pictures from the website I mentioned above, it is) so that once we get out there this weekend we will be treated to what is becoming a rarer sight these days. But if you’re so inclined to go, this weekend, or next would be the best time.



Remember we are talking about small flowers and if you drive too fast you may just not notice them (unless this is one of the really good years and then you can’t miss them). The really good news is that even in a dry year there are always some flowers during the Spring. The ocotillo cactus was well leafed out a few weeks ago and should be in full bloom by now. Many of the other cacti are starting to bloom including the barrel cactus with its crown of yellow flowers.



You may ask where is the best viewing? Well again it depends upon the time of year. If it’s early take Interstate 8 out to Ocotillo, then travel along the S2, North towards Borrego Springs. However, right now I would recommend going up to Julian then down Banner grade to Borrego Springs. It’s not only faster, but you will see the wild daffodils blooming in Julian.

Once you get to Borrego Springs be sure to visit the park headquarters as they have an area where most of the flowers can be seen growing. Because they water this area the flowers start earlier and last longer. There are good bathrooms there (important info for us “mature” people) and also picnic and hiking areas with a concrete path that loops around for about ½ mile. For the heartier hikers, there is the Palm Oasis trail which truly is one of the nicest in the park when the flowers are blooming. Remember this is a desert so bring lots of water to drink when you hike. That’s all for this issue, next month I will have a full report on our trip coming up this weekend.



Brian & Drew's Engagement Party



With more weddings on the horizon it was inevitable that just like spring flowers, engagement parties would be sprouting up. Such was the case on March 12, at Listy and Bob Gillingham's home as they hosted a party for Brian and Drew.

The party started at 4:00 (to allow for the grandkid's naps to get out of the way... and some adults) and as guest arrived they were introduced to Drew. This was Drew's first experience meeting the Riel clan and he was a bit nervous (OK he was downright intimidated at the thought of meeting the whole family at once) but his apprehensions were quickly put aside by the warm welcome he received from everyone.

List and the "Bird" did a fabulous job decorating the house with a Las Vegas theme as this is where Drew proposed to Brian. But they also had some cupcakes that were custom made topped with Harry Potter decorations, in honor of their wedding which will also be Potter themed.

There was plenty to eat and drink including some very good meatballs, pulled pork sandwiches, ham sandwiches, coleslaw, fruit, crackers and cheese. Drew was able to witness the age old adage that somewhat defines the Riel family... "the quick





Everyone took turns holding her, especially Grandma Carol, and Grandpa Jeff. All of the “Sisters” got their baby fix as well as the other aunts in the room. It was really special to have Madeline join the party at such a young age. In fact, according to the “official Riel record book” she now holds the record for being the youngest attendee at a Riel function!!

At around 6:00 Bob started to hand out “the Song” to the Riel singers. Yes, no major event can pass without a song to commemorate it and this night would be no different. “The Song” was sung to the tune of “piano man” and a copy of the lyrics are shown in the sidebar to this article. As usual the song was performed with much enthusiasm, mostly hoping to mask the fact that very few of the singers can hold a key. But it turned out great and both Brian and Drew got a big kick out of it.

After the song was complete it was time for a quick toast then on to the Harry Potter cupcakes! After some prompting by an un-named photographer, Drew and Brian “fed” each other the tasty treats. I think it was because it was getting dark but both seemed to miss the target and the cupcakes somehow got smashed into each other’s faces. After a quick face wash they were both no worse for the wear and the party continued well into the night. OK keep in mind that anything past 7:00 PM is well into the night for this group.

After a few more pictures it was time to call it a night, but we want to thank everyone who attended for making Drew feel so welcome and making this party a big success. We thank Listy and Bob for hosting it and as always, doing a great job preparing for the party. So now it’s 6 months and counting until the “Big Day” in September, the 17th to be exact. Also this is just the start of the next set of weddings with Bryce and Bridgett getting married in June of ’17, then Frank and Samantha getting married sometime in ’18, these next few years should be filled with more Riel events just like this one.

and the fed,” as no one was bashful about having a few bites to eat. In my humble opinion, the food was some of the best we have ever had at these types of occasions. But then again I am partial to the Sweet Hawaiian rolls they used to make the sandwiches.

Another highlight of the party was when Jason and Chavva arrived with, just over a week old Madeline, the newest member to the Riel family.



Brian and Drew's Song (Sung to: "Piano Man")

It's five o'clock on a Saturday,
With family and friends all around.
There's a young man sitting right next to me,
Saying, "My one true love I have found."

I say, "Come with me to the promised land,"
Queen Creek is the place of our dreams.
It's dry and it's hot,
And the a/c is shot,
But it's all so much more than it seems.

Sing us a song like at Burning Man,
We'll toast with a glass of red wine.
And maybe some Quidditch will pleasure you,
And we'll all end up feeling just fine.

Kona Bear is an awesome dog,
She barks and she begs just for me.
And she's quick with a lick or to fetch an old stick,
But there's some place that she'd rather be.

She growls, "Guys, this place is just killing me,"
As a smile runs away from her snout.
"I'd much rather be by the beach in SD, and...
If I could drive a damn car... I'd be out!"

Now Drew is an awesome young gentleman,
Who's never had time for a wife.
But his crazy bow tie helped him catch Brian's eye,
Now the two will be joining for life.

And Brian he toils at the grocery store,
He's feeding the masses we say.
Though the work can be a bit perilous,
He manages to find a Safe Way.

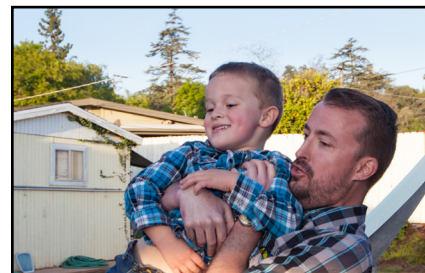
Sing us a song like at Burning Man,
We'll toast with a fine glass of wine.
And maybe some Quidditch will pleasure you,
And we'll all end up feeling just fine.

It's a pretty good crowd for a Saturday,
For an engagement that began in LV.
'Cause they know that it's them that we've come here for,
To celebrate ma-tri-mo-ny.

And these singers are sounding quite loopy now,
And the papers all smell like a beer.
But they're happy to see that the two of you,
Are joyous and loving and... (Pause)... HERE!

Sing us a song like at Burning Man,
We'll toast with a fine glass of wine.
And maybe some Quidditch will pleasure you,
And we'll all end up feeling just fine.

Congratulations, Brian and Drew!



Bruce Update

By Bruce Hartman



February has been a tough month! So I thought I might take a minute to simply whine about it...I don't subscribe to the old adage that "misery loves company" but I do feel like, well, I just want to complain!

When Birdy and I went to bed on Valentine's evening there was nothing wrong with my ankles. (I need to be specific since there is something wrong with most of my body parts at any given time).

When we woke up in the morning my left ankle was huge with swelling and very painful. I thought it to be a flair-up of gout since that is a typical trait of the disease...to sneak up on you in your sleep. I took the meds I have for treating gout (This is not my first rodeo) and figured it would be gone in a couple days.

Two days later my right ankle was swollen and the pain so intense in both that I had to be 100% wheelchair dependent in the house and at work. I treated it for a week and just got worse...the pain was overwhelming and I'm pretty good with pain! I was eating dilaudid (morphine) like candy and up to 100mg daily of prednisone receiving little relief. (That's a lot even for me) At the ten-day point I had hit the wall and drove myself to the ER...I needed help in a bad way!

Since I had just spent a week in the hospital for another blood clot and pulmonary embolism just three weeks prior the docs were concerned that this ankle thing could be significant. They did all the blood work to rule out the world and sent me for an ultrasound of the leg veins. They finally determined that I had an infection going on that had infiltrated the deep tissue layers of the legs which explained the crazy pain. A couple IV bags of antibiotics, more IV dilaudid and a bottle of antibiotic pills and they sent me packing. I was so relieved to think the pain would subside in a couple days.

Well dammit! The pain just worsened. I was truly at the end of my rope...I was two weeks in and getting worse with pain that I already thought was unmanageable! Since I had a follow up appointment scheduled for Friday the 26th with my primary care doc, I waited on going back to the hospital. Being on a first name basis with an entire emergency room staff is kind of weird...but they are nice people! Anyway... my doctor looked at the oozing infected leg and determined that the antibiotic wasn't working...Duh! They gave me an IV of a different antibiotic on Friday in the doctor's office and scheduled me for a Saturday appointment for another bag of it.

Well, I'm writing this at 2:00 in the morning on Saturday because the pain is out of control and I can't sleep. I can only hope that by tomorrow there is some relief...I don't think I can keep going like this where everyday everything worsens! I guess that sounded a little doomsdayish...I will endure but THIS SUCKS!!!!!!

Sorry...no happy ending to this one. I warned you before you started reading that I just wanted to whine, and so I did! I know I should "cowboy-up" but, ya know, sometimes it is hard to muster and easier to succumb to the "poor me" pity-pot. There is no uplifting message or benefit to any readers...but, I feel better to have whined and complained...thanks for your ear(s).

I have been asked many times for recommendations of what to do/ see in Spain because of my experience living there. I am always so happy and excited to help people plan their trips because I want them to see and feel what I love about Spain. So, when Ana and Craig messaged me about their upcoming Barcelona trip, I immediately started writing an essay. Then, I thought, why don't I keep this information logged somewhere as opposed to re-writing it every time? I am also kicking myself for not better logging my experience in Spain. Thus, I decided I am going to try to make travel guide over time via the RFNL, as often as possible sharing some ideas or experiences I had. I will share some information about my favorite spots in Europe and hopefully others can share their travel experiences, too! However, every traveller is different and likes to spend their time on different things. So, knowing what Craig and Ana want out of their trip I am going to call this edition:



ASK ANNIE

RFNL Travel Editor

The outdoorsy, historic, artsy guide to Barcelona Gaudi Sights:

There are a million Gaudia things you can see and pay to do in Barcelona, but you don't need to do them all. I would recommend the following visits, they are pretty expensive for museums but absolutely worth it. You will never see anything like it anywhere else!

1. Parq Guell is the outdoor Gaudi park. You now have to pay to visit and I am pretty sure when you do so you need to select a time slot. I would do this ahead of time so you aren't waiting in line up there. I would also recommend bringing a snack or something because it is a really cool park to walk around (you can go on some trails even) and you will probably get hungry. There is only one café within the park and it is very obviously expensive.
2. Sagrada familia is the famously unfinished Gaudi church. Again, long lines and very expensive but absolutely worth it. Also make sure to either get a guide book to read or one of the audioguides because it makes a lot more sense once you know what you are looking at.



3. Casa Battlo is my other favorite Gaudi sight. It is a Gaudi house that you can visit and the entire architecture inside and out is Gaudi. You go into rooms to see strangely formed rooms, staircases, etc and even go on the roof. Definitely worth it. In terms of other Gaudi sights, there is Casa Vicens, La Pedrera and a crazy amount of Gaudi sprinkled throughout the city that you can just look at. I wouldn't pay for La Pedrera because you just go on the roof- its cool but way too short of a visit for the price.

Neighborhoods in Barcelona:

El Raval: Once trashy and sketchy turned trendy and hipster/ hippie? neighborhood. Lots of kiddos on skateboards being rebels with no real cause. It is a heavily immigrant populated neighborhood so you get

more variety of food. There are many museums on this side of Las Ramblas but I love the bars and little food spots here. You can wander and quickly become lost because the alleys are all crooked and criss crossing. I would absolutely recommend just wandering and stopping at different spots to have a drink then keep wandering.

Gracia: The original neighborhood before neighborhoods in Barcelona existed. Not far from the center of town, this neighborhood has so many original families and therefore traditions and family owned shops and restaurants. Great neighborhood to bike around.

El Borne: Trendy little neighborhood with boutiques and cute cafes. An awesome center plaza to just hang out, also a great neighborhood to bike in! In terms of biking, you could really go from here to the beach and all around. I just would avoid the highly pedestrian areas like ramblas and barrio gotico because you will never make it through.

Barrio Gotico: Touristy frenzee! You have to go here because it is where the main cathedral is but you will want to get out asap because it is SO crowded. Again, winding roads that criss cross back and forth and such much to see. There a little sections such as the art area, the fashion area, etc where the designers live and work. In terms of the cathedral, try to check when they do the traditional dance (Sundays?) to see the Catalan culture.

Ramblas: The main stretch down the middle with a million performers, vendors, etc. Just be careful of pickpockets!

Other:

Lovella Negra: An underground cave-like Sangria bar. Tucked away on a side street, just a cool spot I always like to visit when I am in BCN.

Boqueria: HUGE market off of Las Ramblas full of food. Get a fresh made smoothie or some cheese samples! Really worth just walking around and looking at everything.

Montjuic/ Plaza de España: Fountains! Check out when the fountain show is because it is awesome! Also, the architecture is so cool. Finally, the old plaza de toros is there but has been converted into a mall because bull fighting is banned in Catalonia. It still looks like a plaza de toros on the outside which is pretty cool to see such a historic building being used for a different purpose today. I think it is cool that they didn't tear it down!

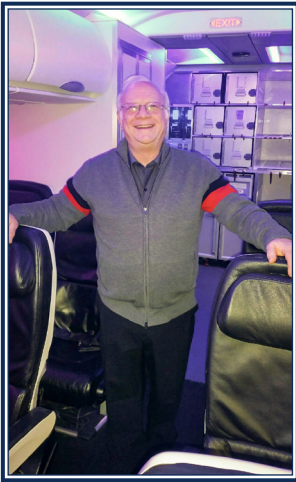
Outside of BCN:

1. Montserrat: A breathtaking monastery built into a mountain. You can hike all around up there. Definitely an awesome day trip, a must see.
2. Figueres: Dali museum. If Dali is at all interesting to you, go to this museum. Super cool!
3. Girona: A lovely place to walk around because of its history. It has beautifully colored houses that line a river running around the town. Also an intricate Jewish quarter with skinny little alleys and shops tucked into walls.

If you are willing to go further:

1. Bilbao: Has the Guggenheim.
2. Zaragoza: Has a beautiful church and some great history as well.
3. Pamplona: Has Hemingway. I would highly recommend Pamplona. It is an incredible city with a more authentic Spain feel than BCN. Barcelona is lovely but is like a world of its own- not necessarily representing what everyday life is like in the rest of Spain. Catalans don't particularly want to be Spanish anyway so that city is just different. Pamplona would give you a great idea of how other cities work in Spain and the laid back culture of just walking around, sitting in plazas having a beer. So much history of Hemingway and just taking in what he saw in Spain is fascinating. And there's that whole running of the bulls thing that happens there, too.

I hope this helps and keep in mind there is SO much to see and do in Barcelona that my suggestions by no means cover it all. It is a great city to just wander around in and get lost, discovering your own top sights and pit stops. I hope you have an amazing trip!



Jeff has started his new part time job with Virgin America! Best Part? It comes with flight privileges for both himself and Carol!



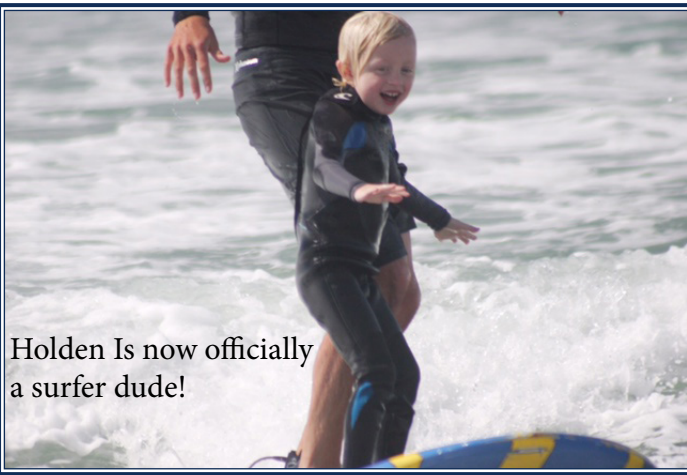
1 year old Grayson is ready for the waves dude

PIGTAILS!

Bennie is a ring bearer in a Texas Wedding next month and is showing off his new suit for the occasion!



Grayson digs in to Grandma Carol's Custom Sugar-free Birthday Cake!



Holden Is now officially a surfer dude!

