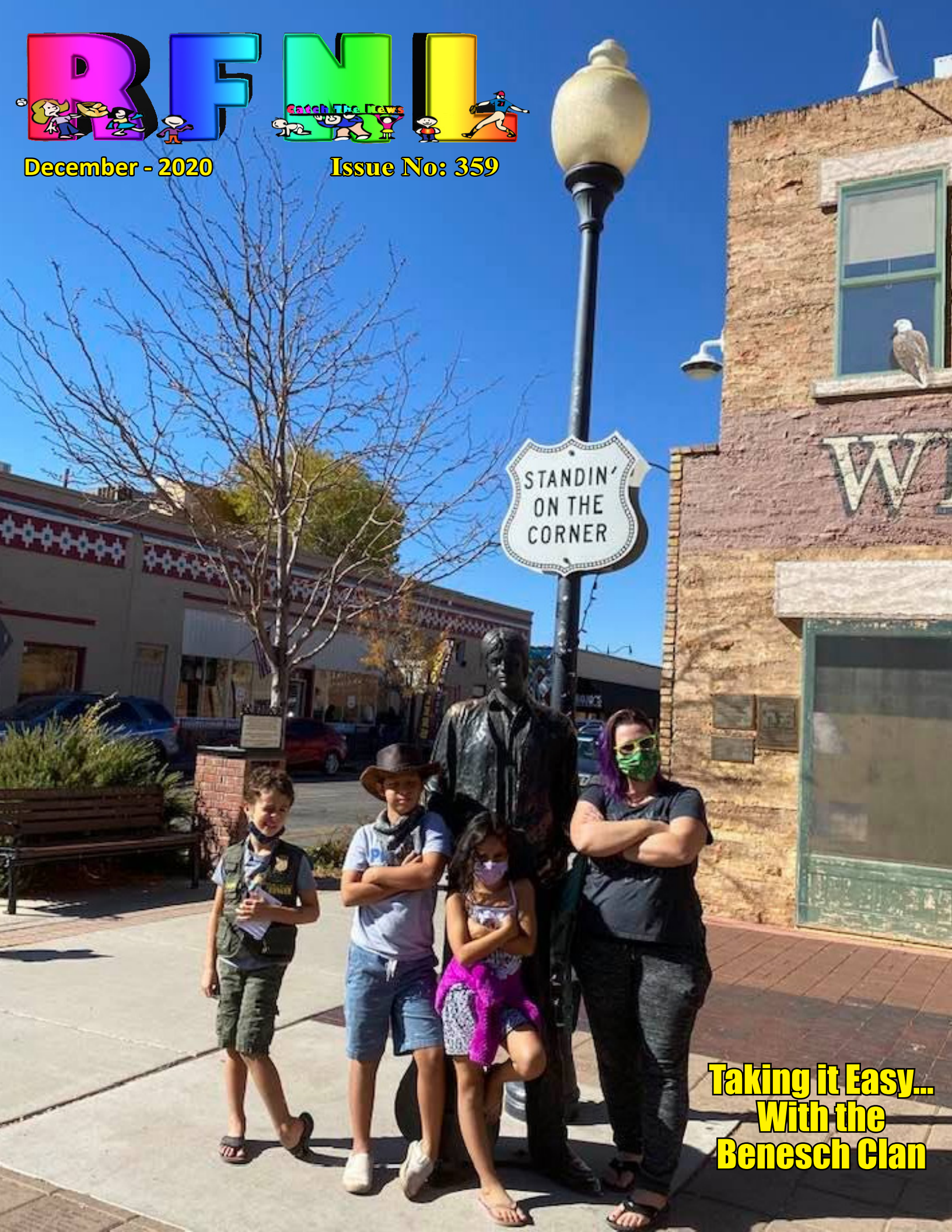


# RFNI

December - 2020

Issue No: 359



**Taking it Easy...  
With the  
Benesch Clan**

# A Worldwide Pandemic Can't Stop the Benesch Family

By Carol Benesch

I was going to send a blank page for my article declaring nothing much happened in 2020 due to the pandemic, until I went back and looked for pictures to put on our holiday card and I realized all we have done!! Our biggest disappointment was being in LA on March 13th all packed for our annual trip to New Zealand. We were to leave Monday morning but on Sunday night we got the news that New Zealand had closed their borders...in hindsight a very smart move. We were both very disappointed and came home leaving our bags packed in hopes of going in a few weeks. The bag with the toys, candy and sunflower seeds (probably stale now) remain packed in hopes of going sometime before the kids are in college!! We mailed the clothes because none of them would still fit if we hadn't. We had just come off a trip to Iceland and whale watching in Loreto, so staying home was not making it until Bob and Listy convinced us that it was the perfect time to remodel. You all know that story...



From there came the sad news that Jess, Miguel and kids could not fly here for their annual Cali trip. We were all very disappointed until Jessica and Miguel bought their first RV and tested it out by driving cross country!! They spent 10 days on an epic trip stopping at National parks and other adventures along the way. Happiness arrived on July 2nd in a beautiful, but big, RV!! We all wondered what 10 days in "Harvey" the RV with a quiet (hehe) family of 5 would bring us. They pulled up to our house, happy, excited and ready to start their summer vacay, and Jessica and Miguel, looking forward to their Palm Springs vacation!

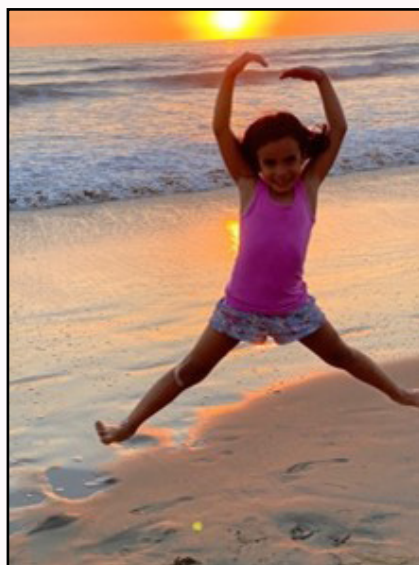


We didn't get to do the usual amusement parks, parties and museums, but thanks to Harvey we did get in a few, very fun camping trips. Our first one was to Lake Jennings, not a far drive and a beautiful lake where we celebrated Ben's 9th birthday. He got a fishing pole, so we did a lot of casting, line breaking, lure losing and a few nibbles. But we had a lot of fun the whole time. Ben's favorite meal is lobster and shrimp which tasted even better after a long day fishing, hiking and playing games.





Our next trip was to Lake Cuyamaca. We enjoyed more fishing, this time from a little motorboat with Jeff as our skipper, lots of Great Blue Herons, our favorite we named Heron Burr... a trip to Julian for fresh apple pie and root beer sarsaparilla, then panning for gold with a tour of the local mine. A highlight was watching the bats come out in swarms eating the twilight insects. They would fly all around us never running into us but getting close.



We spent 4 days in Ventura where we could walk to the beach, the only problem, it was a cold and windy week. The kids still enjoyed the beach and loved riding their bikes along the beach on a designated path. We also got to spend a day visiting Jeff's mom and sister, outside and safely distanced.





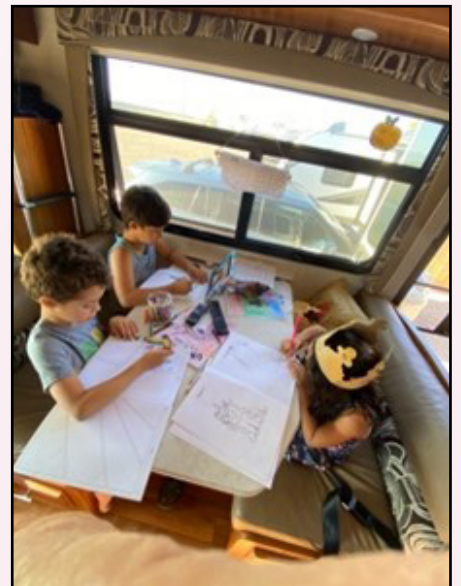
Our last summer venture was to Rincon beach which was basically a parking spot along the beach. If you looked out the window on one side it was beautiful, the other side was a street with a train not too far off taking away from the beauty. Jeff and I decided to get a room at the Cliff House so the kids could swim in a pool if the beach was too cold. The weather was beautiful, with the beach being much warmer than the hotel swimming pool!! Jeff and I got to enjoy a delightful meal outside with a beautiful sunset. It was great being able to walk out of the RV onto the sand and as soon as the kids were done with their remote learning, we hit the beach and spent the rest of the day having fun. A starfish, seaweed, clams

sand crabs and waves kept the kids busy and happy!

Summer was different but fun, the cousins loved being with each other. And we were in our happy place watching them all swim, play Minecraft, ride bikes, eat ice cream, play games, jump on the trampoline, and have sleep overs! School started and bedtimes had to be adjusted. It was very difficult getting everyone up and the computers cranked up and ready to start distance learning by 6am!! The good part was they were finished by 10:30 and there was plenty of the day left.



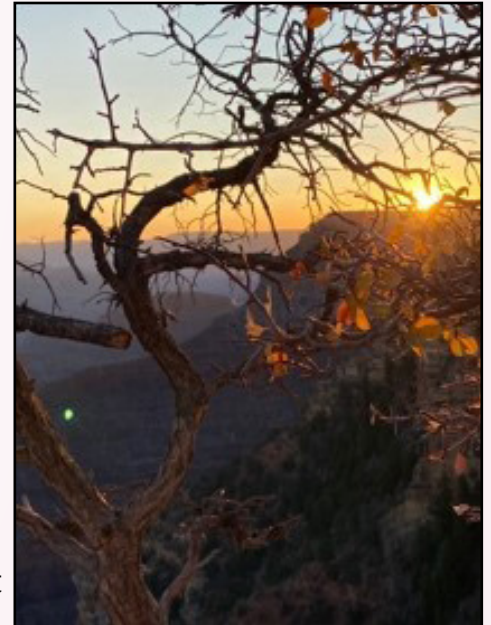
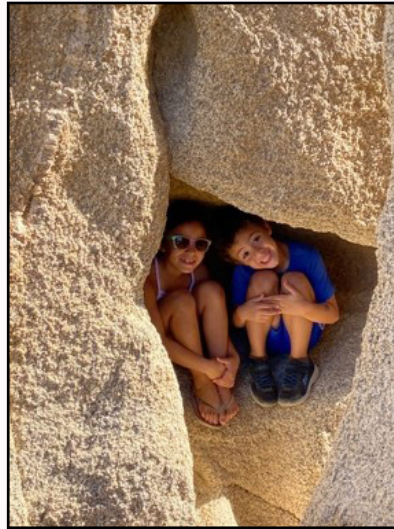
As always, good times must come to an end. On November 1st the RV was packed and it was time to head back across country. Miguel planned to meet us in New Mexico and Jeff was going to fly home from there but I had planned on going all the way to NJ. With COVID on the rise, I decided flying back from NJ was a risk I didn't want to take. So, Jeff and I accompanied Jess and the kids to New Mexico, Jeff following the RV in our SUV and I was the "RV Attendant" getting drinks, snacks, games and just having fun with the kids and Jessica.



We decided to take Route 66 back and had a lot of fun listening to oldies on the radio and stopping at fun/historical stops along the way. We spent the first night in Joshua Tree National Park which is beautiful desert scenery. The kids did their Jr. Ranger walk and learned all about the area. The rock climbing was a big hit!



Then It was on to The Grand Canyon!! We stopped in Williams and spent some time walking around the cute little downtown area. We got to the Grand Canyon before dark and the kids got to see the canyon for the first time. It was fun to share this time with them, who doesn't remember the first time seeing



this canyon!! We spent 2 days in the park and viewed the canyon from many different spots. We got up early and watched the sun rise and then set at the end of the day. Much to the kids delight, the friendly local mule deer and elks shared our camping grounds.

The only frustrating part, it was election day, and we had no cell service or internet. Thank goodness for satellite radio where Jeff could get us updates.



After the Grand Canyon we continued our trip stopping at many Route 66 spots including places where the ideas for the movie Cars was created and the famous corner in Winslow AZ. Lots of tourist stops and then drove through the Petrified National Monument and viewed the Painted Desert.

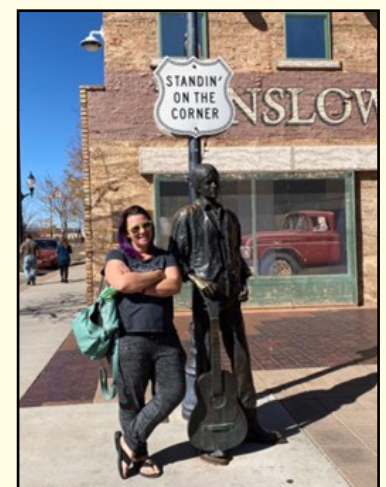


The kids continued their Jr Ranger quest and we saw so many beautiful views!! Our destination was Grants, New Mexico where we stayed at Bandera Volcano and Ice Cave Park.



In the morning we took a hike up the volcano to peer into the crater and then down to see the ice cave. It was a fun hike with lots of numbered stops to read and learn about. It was our last hike together which made it a little sad, but the kids were happy that they were going to see their dad again in a very short drive to Albuquerque.

Before we departed, we had a treat including sparkling cider, toasting a great California visit during a bad time, to better times ahead with our new president and hopefully a vaccine!! There were tears, but we know we will be together for many more adventures in the future!!



# The Mehan's Thanksgiving

By Margaret Riel



This was not the Thanksgiving that we traditionally look forward to all year. There was no shopping lists, patio cleanup, reorganization of the furniture, flower arranging, or late night and early morning cooking. For the first time in decades, we were not able to welcome the family to our house to celebrate Thanksgiving. The weather was perfect (we have never been rained out).

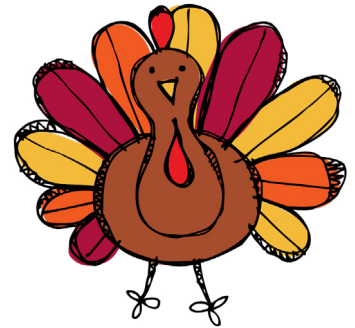
So what did happen on Thanksgiving Thursday? First, we slept in-- no 5am alarm to get that big bird in the oven. We zoomed (virtually) with a subset of family from 10:00 - 11:00--which included Dustin driving to work in New Zealand on a Friday summer morning. Big Al was there as was Brett. During this time, our only guests, Michael, Ashley, Emily, and Addy made their appearance. We followed COVID rules. Guests stayed outside. They brought their own plates, flatware, cups, and drinks. All the places were set with placements that Emily and Addy had made and there were glitter leaves flying on strings that they cut out colored and covered with glitter. We used almost as many platters as we would for the large group as everything was on separate serving dishes. We served salmon and Tri-tip. Since they would continue on to Ashley's family afterward with Turkey served (outdoors), we skipped the turkey. But we did have twice baked potatoes! We missed the large range of dishes and Carol's traditional orange salad, but it was a good meal. The turkey brownies were both fun to make with the kids and a good ending to the meal. And then they were off to celebrate with the other half of their family.





The Riel family gathered a second time at 3:00 online to share stories and this time, Lauren and the kids from New Zealand joined us which was a treat. It was great seeing Michelle and knowing she was in San Diego yet quarantined in a hotel room before deployment. She showed us her ship out the window. And we got a video tour of Bridget and Bryce's new home. So, we had a sense of the larger family, yet everyone was trapped in small video squares.

Ashley's parents kindly saved us the turkey bones so we could later enjoy a dinner of turkey soup. The smell of Turkey soup made it feel a bit more normal. Next year you are all invited, once again, to the Riel/Mehans for Thanksgiving.





# Gillingham Thanksgiving



By Listy Gillingham



We had probably one of the largest Thanksgiving celebrations with our small family of twelve as we are one of the most fortunate of the siblings to have all of our “kids” still living in San Diego. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic it was by no means typical because we did not get to celebrate it with everyone as we have for so many years. Thanksgiving was a topic of many lunch discussions over the last few months, wondering if we could safely have it, but as we got closer and closer to the date, the risk seemed too overwhelming for everyone and so it was decided by all to keep to our own families (something Mom and Dad would have been sad to see).



We typically have two meals for Thanksgiving. One with the Riel family with close to 50 people at Margaret’s and Bud’s house and one with the Gillingham family at Bob’s brother’s house (Dave and Sue) in Coronado with close to 40 people. So strange to think that a gathering of 12 people was something we should worry about for this holiday, but it was definitely on our minds as we met outside for the entire event. Lucky for us, the weather was perfect and everyone dressed for the occasion. We started the meal with a Gillingham tradition of pumpkin soup which was something Martha Gillingham (Bob’s mom) introduced when our kids were all young. It was such a hit, Bob’s cousin Doug Gillingham, took over the chef role and has been making it for us ever since. With the Gillingham clan cancel-





ing our event, Dave made it clear to Doug that we all would still expect a soup delivery and in the spirit of family traditions, Doug made a delivery to us on Wednesday morning so we would be set for the holiday.

Listy made the rest of the meal, thinking that one chef was safer for all. She also placed the kids with the beer and wine responsibilities (they love it when they get a break) and it gave them more time to spend with their families. We ate early (that's Evie-friendly) and enjoyed a fire-flame center piece to keep us cozy warm as we were seated 6 feet apart with our two tables combined. Though it wasn't as crazy or filled with family news like a typical Thanksgiving, it was still a day to be thankful for our health and good fortune over the year.



I'm especially thankful for my families on both sides who have always been a source of love and support to help us raise such great kids. I am also thankful that my kids found wonderful spouses that I love with all my heart too. They complete our family in such a wonderful way! And my grandkids rock (as you all know if you have grandkids) our world too! So though Dad and Mom would have been sad to know we were apart breaking their long-standing tradition, they would appreciate that we did keep the holiday alive until the world is a little safer.



# Thanksgiving NOT Riel Style



By Birdy Hartman Hall

This is a Thanksgiving for the books. For the first time ever, there was no magical family get together at Margaret's and Bud's. No amazing Christmas photos by brother Bob. No turkey, orange goop, marshmallowed sweet potatoes or dressings. No endless family conversations and soccer matches.



This Covid Thanksgiving took away all of that but...it didn't take away the family bond that we all share. I am thankful for my family. We were fortunate enough to have Michelle home for the week before Thanksgiving. We had a small gathering of siblings for dinner at our new home. We dined outdoors and enjoyed the love of being as close as you can during these scary times. I am thankful for my golfing games with my siblings as well. We may not have shared a toast around the table, but we do remain in close contact as we whack golf balls around Mission Trails in memory of our parents.



I am thankful for Lyle’s sister (Leslie) and brother-in-law (Howard) that braved the Covid exposure and came to our home for some turkey and fixins. I am thankful for Craig, Ana and the kids that spent Thanksgiving evening with us eating vegetarian lasagna (because there is just so much turkey one family can eat!) I am thankful for Brett and Carinda that came all this way to spend some time with close friends and family. We enjoyed our third Thanksgiving feast with them and Lyle Allen, Cindy, and Baby Emory. We dined on fish tacos and said “Ole” to Francie.



So even though San Diego was shut down from big family get-togethers, we found a safe way to be close to those we love. I hope you are able to do the same and continue to stay healthy and happy during these not so jolly times. Happy Thanksgiving to us all!



# RUNNY NOSE SECTION



By Margaret Riel

## Modern Medicine Solving The Problems of Aging

As we age, our bodies occasionally need a tune up to keep up with the challenges of life.

Margaret had a pointer finger that rebelled refusing to contribute to the work that a hand has to do every day. Cortisone shots helped - but they only delayed the need. By October it was clear that surgery was needed. And so a few weeks ago, the knife came out, the wrist was opened and the inflammation was removed. With the exception of missing a few weeks of family golf, and some tightness that should go away, all is good with the hand. But another tune up was needed. Margaret's left eye was troubled with a creeping pterygium--a growth on the white of the eye. It was causing pain as the position caused the eyelid to be lifted and that interfered with lids job of keeping the eye moist. Margaret returned to surgery for some slicing of the eye tissue. Fortunately, it went well and soon that eye will be back to normal.



Ed also needed some surgical tune up. This past week he had day surgery to put in place a new solution to problems that have arisen from prostate problems. He is hopeful that being retired he will be able to get the rest needed for a recovery. It was harder to do this when he was working. And he has the joy of three little grandkids always ready to make life more interesting.

Bud's heart and hip are competing for attention. You might remember that in May his heart was repaired saving him from what could have been a fatal attack. However, his heart now needs time to recover, which has postponed his hip replacement surgery. His hip has lost its cartilage and has been waiting, less and less, patiently to be taken care of. First it was no "elective" surgery because of Covid19. Then it was the heart's turn. Now there is this 6-month waiting period for the heart to get strong enough for the surgery. Meanwhile, the leg is going on strike with the hip, knee, and muscles refusing to play nicely together. Any attempt to help one of them causes the other two to scream pain. So he is not as mobile as he would like and he is just waiting and hoping that as the new year starts, his heart doctor will ok the hip surgery.

# Runny Nose and Eyes!!!

By Carol Benesch



I have been having problems with my eyes while watching TV, plays and/or movies, for about 6 months now. The double vision started after my eye surgery and the doctor said that was normal and it would go away. It didn't bother me that much as I don't really watch TV, I listen because I'm usually doing something else as well. Movies and plays bothered me a bit, but if I really wanted to see, I would just close my left eye.

Then my eyes got worse, and it seemed to happen overnight! I was driving and all of the sudden the white lines were going diagonally and next there were multiple cars, it was hard to tell what was really there! I quickly realized that if I shut one eye, I could see fine. I drove like that for while hoping it would go away, but it didn't.

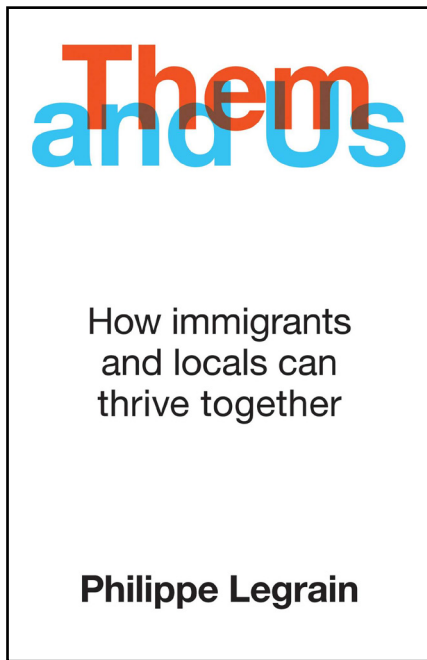
I went to my eye doctor. She did some test to determine, that yes, I was had double vision. Funny, I knew it immediately, but it took her a good hour to figure it out!! She told us all the scary things it could be and then sent us to see a specialist. After a 3-hour appointment, this doctor also determined I had double vision, ugh. She also went over all the scary things it could be, and then started ruling each out, one by one. In the end, she diagnosed my condition as binocular vertical diplopia and divergence insufficiency or double vision! There are still some things it could be which will not be ruled out until Dec. 22 when I have an MRI of the brain and my orbitals. Meanwhile, the treatment for the double vision is prism glasses, yuck!!

My eyesight has improved to the point where I don't need to wear the glasses anymore, I don't see 2 tennis players, or twice the amount of traffic, and tv watching etc. is back to what it was. I'm not sure if that is a good sign or not, but I will be happy after the MRI is complete.

## What is binocular vertical diplopia?

*Patients with vertical diplopia complain of seeing two images, one atop or diagonally displaced from the other. The assessment of these patients begins with a thorough history, including questions about previous eye muscle operations, childhood strabismus, and patching or orthoptic exercises.*

*Divergence insufficiency is an acquired disorder that produces comitant esodeviation that is greater at distance than at near. This disorder is usually benign, but it can be confused with bilateral sixth nerve palsy, although the latter is associated with abnormal speed and amplitude of abducting saccades. Divergence paralysis also may occur as an incipient manifestation of a unilateral sixth nerve palsy or appear in the resolving phase of a sixth nerve palsy; it has also been reported in association with altered intracranial pressure, midbrain tumors, craniocervical junction lesions, or spinocerebellar ataxia. Therefore, divergence paralysis should prompt the same evaluation as for a bilateral or chronic unilateral sixth nerve palsy, including neuroimaging.*



## Book Review By Bud Mehan

Phillipe Legrain. 2020.

### Them and Us: How Immigrants and Locals Can Thrive Together.

*London: One World Publications.*

Phillipe Legrain (Gerard's oldest son) is the second cousin of the Riel Clan (Richard, Ed, Margaret, Carol, Robert, Birdie, and Listy) and Michael Merica. In this, his fifth book, he has written a compelling, informative, and accessible account of the value and contributions of immigrants who migrate to highly industrialized Western nations (e.g., Britain, US, Britain, France, Germany).

#### **Excerpt:**

*The beauty of diversity is that innovation often comes about by serendipity. One day in 1904, at the World Fair in St Louis, the ice cream vendor ran out of cups. Ernest Hami, a Syrian waffle vendor in the booth next door, rolled up some waffles to make cones – and the rest is history. Just as waffles and ice cream combine to create something new and better, so do diverse populations.*

He informs his readers that, as a descendant of immigrants (from Greece to France and Britain), he recoils from the exploitation and insecurity of the current population who try to travel from South to North. He shows no sympathy for the fear and loathing of immigrants exhibited in the current illiberal Populist trend. He describes the benefits that accrue to nations welcoming immigrants: their economies, society, and culture are boosted.

His strategies for convincing skeptics that immigrants are positive for society are compelling. Speaking up for immigrants through facts, arguments, stories, laws and innovative campaigning is vital. In doing so, the choice of terminology matters.

“Newcomers” is less pejorative than “immigrants. Speaking for the entire society rather than a specific class of people is less threatening. Legrain's book suggests that we should be optimistic about creating a better world together.

#### **What do we really know about immigration?**

Immigration is one of the most controversial issues these days. Keeping them out. Taking back control. Building that wall. Whether the debate centres on economics or identity, it is often framed as ‘Them’ (bad immigrants) against ‘Us’ (good locals). But immigrants aren't a burden or a threat – and if we make the right choices we all can thrive together.

Drawing on first-hand reporting, compelling stories and the latest research and evidence from around the world, Philippe Legrain explains how immigration benefits us all in many ways. Immigrants start new businesses, bring different skills and help spark valuable new ideas. They help save lives – including Boris Johnson's. As key workers, they keep coronavirus-stricken societies going, while young newcomers care – and help pay – for our ageing population.

For sure, learning to live together can be tough. The book also addresses tricky issues such as ‘illegal’ immigration, what immigration entails for national identity, what newcomers need to do to fit in, and how societies ought to adapt. And it suggests new ideas for how to persuade moderate sceptics about the merits of immigration.

If patriotism means wanting the best for your country, we should be welcoming immigrants with open arms. It is time to close the gap between myth and reality – and, in the process, close the gap between ‘Them’ and ‘Us’.



# PANDEMIC SCARY HALLOWEEN

By Margaret Riel

*Editor's note: With apologies to the Mehan family I missed this article last month... But as Dad would say... I saved the best for last!*

Halloween came and was celebrated with all of the imaginative fun despite the scary pandemic that shapes our lives. Emily and Addy made the rounds to family homes to show off their costumes and to get treated. Emily chose to be Eliza from the historical production of Alexander Hamilton, one of her friends dressed us as Hamilton. Emily wanted her sister to be Angelica another one of the Skyler sisters but Addy had her ideas. She was Rapunzel and that seems to be her favorite movie character by far. Judi MacMitchell made their color coordinated masks. Margaret carved a pumpkin without the usual kid help and decorated with the help of the witch rather than the kiddos. Treats were left outside in the witch dish for kids who might venture by. We saw a total of 8 trick or treaters, down from the normal 30-40.



Skyline Elementary, Emily and Ashley's school had a clever solution to the problem of safe trick or treating. They used the Halloween day to create a fund raiser trick or treating adventure for the school students. A few dozen families volunteered to help. They entered a competition for the best Halloween house decorations. The students were handed a map and, with their parents driving, they located the different homes and voted on the best decorations. Trick or treating took place from the safety of car windows. This was an inventive way to make it fun for kids, while raising some money for the school.



# FAMILY SHORTS



## Megan and Alan Check in from Seattle

We moved to Seattle knowing only four people here, and the first place we found a community was at Century Ballroom. Alan and I met there on New Year's Eve almost 4 years ago. Before Covid we were taking Salsa lessons on Thursday nights, then would walk across from the ballroom to the Tin Table, have some food and cocktails, then go back for the social dance. I can't imagine Capitol Hill without it. I know this is a hard time for a lot of people, but if you have any money to spare, please donate to their fundraiser. They need to raise \$120k by December 31, 2020, to satisfy the landlords and cover rent through August 2021. Thanks!

<https://www.gofundme.com/f/-campaign-for-CenturyBallroom...>



***Meet Wally Waggles!!!  
David and Bethany's new rescue puppy!***