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Good News Comes in Threes

And the Best is Always Saved for Last

Seamus' Birthday Celebrations

I know this will sound totally crazy to all of you, but Seamus actually turned FORTY this summer!! Despite all the COVID things, we were able to celebrate in multiple ways. In fact, Seamus may be most celebrated 40-year-old of all time!



**Famous Seamus
Celebrates
Like He's 20!**

(Times Two)

By Kristy Kieth



Our first celebration took place in Huntington Beach (which my mom covered in the last RFNL... check it out if you haven't already!! She threw a pretty awesome party). After that, we ditched the kids and headed up to Tahoe for an amazing get-away with some of our close friends! We enjoyed rafting down the Truckee River, gambling in Reno, and even had an amazing dinner on our VRBO dock thanks to a private chef! It really couldn't have been a better escape. Thanks to our family for letting us sneak away!!



Shortly after that, we headed to Newport Beach for a week away with the Keith family. Our first Sunday there happened to be the day when Seamus and I were supposed to complete the San Diego Half Marathon (we are legacy runners...nothing close to my mom's Rock and Roll status, but we are working on it!!). So, we mapped out a course that took us from Newport to Laguna Beach and we got 'er done! The rest of the week was spent relaxing at the pool (Liam even won Bingo!!), hanging at the beach, cooking family dinners, and visiting Balboa Island! We celebrated Seamus' actual birthday on the 22nd by renting a grill at the beach and having a fun bonfire.



Since that obviously wasn't enough celebrating, we decided to ditch the kids again and head to Harrah's for a quick weekend on the lazy river! Our neighbors came to celebrate with us, and we all got to pretend that we were young and carefree for one more weekend before the summer ended.



I am documenting all of these celebrations for posterity in the RFNL so when I turn 40 (in a VERY, VERY long time from now), there will be no excuses for all of the celebrations that will need to happen. Seamus, start planning now.

East Coast Summer Adventures



By Listy Gillingham

Our plans for a summer, East Coast trip, were made by our friends Kym and Doug Farkas. Kym had won a travel award from Francis Parker for her long-time service and originally, it was going to be used for a trip to Greece and Paris (we were going to tag along as well). However, Covid hit and that changed everything. With her pending retirement this summer, she had to use the funds or lose them. She was reading a book about the Isle of Palms in South Carolina; thus, our first destination was found. We also all read a book titled, *The South of Broad* by Pat Conroy, which also added some energy around visiting Charleston as well.





Our first stop was to stay 4 nights at the Wild Dunes Resort which was everything you might hope for in a beach vacation. Miles of open beach on the east coast, nice warm water, giant pools, outdoor entertainment every night, roof top vistas to watch the sunset, and great friends. We had a long walk to Sullivan’s Island (over 11 miles), and we visited various spots in the area that included: Charleston, Shem Island, the Citadel (for Dad), the Angel Tree, and many bars and restaurants along the way. The Southern Hospitality was noted as everyone we met was friendly and willing to share ideas on what was best to eat, drink or see.



Our next stop was a one-night adventure to see Williamsburg, Virginia known for being a colonial reenactment spot for families to visit. Since the drive was long (close to 500 miles), we didn’t see too much activity, however we did wander into an open field where they had a live band playing music that night and we had the opportunity to dance with the locals. As the sun set, and Bob got hungry, we shifted gears and started to look for someplace to eat. Lucky for us, we beat the crowds, because as we began to leave, a storm pulled in and we got a great East Coast down pour. We were lucky to enjoy a nice dinner and then we let Doug run back to our hotel (he volunteered) to pick up the car and save us from getting drenched as our walk back would have been about a mile.



We left early the next day to meet Admiral Bruce Gillingham for lunch in Washington D.C. and then spent the afternoon looking at the outdoor memorials along the mall. We saw the Martin Luther King, World War 2, Korean War (getting a current upgrade), Lincoln, Vietnam, and Roosevelt memorials. It was amazing to see how empty the whole park area was because there were no tour buses hauling middle schoolers or high schoolers around the area due to COVID. That was a nice surprise.





After that, we headed for our next destination which was Lancaster, Penn. to stay at a Bed and Breakfast Inn owned by friends of Doug from his younger years. The B. F. Hiestand House Bed and Breakfast was in the town of Marietta and proved to be a great place to stay. Each morning we were treated to a home-cooked meal that was made by scratch and kept us full for most of the day! We ventured out into the Amish country making stops in Bird in a Hand, Intercourse, Hershey, and Lancaster. We saw Amish buggies traveling among the cars and signs of yesteryear with clothes lines donning old fashion clothing. It reminded me of our house in Mission Hills where mom used to dry our clothes across the canyon!



Our last stop was Pittsburgh (Doug grew up in this area) where we met with his relatives for a nice afternoon lunch and visit. We enjoyed walks along the Three River Bridges, a trip to the Strip District (a shopping area), and around the city. We had dinner at the Hoffbauer House but noted that it wasn't anything like the one we've visited in Munich with our kids.

All in all, we had a great time and felt as though we had a safe journey across the coast given the crazy pandemic, we did our best to avoid. Special thanks to our friends, Kym and Doug, for planning and sharing this crazy trip with us!

Carinda's Baby Shower

By Brett Sorem



One of the main events you get when you're pregnant is a baby shower! It's a chance to feel supported and loved. Unfortunately, our opportunity to go down to SD for a few months changed so I didn't think having a shower made any sense being far away. Plus, I was trying to be mindful of Covid. Birdy asked me what my plan was about having a shower, and when I told her my apprehensions, she couldn't take "no" as an answer. She immediately wanted to step in and offered to help host it at their place. It didn't take too much convincing knowing I was going to have a shower at their beautiful home ;), but Bryce, Bridget, and Kieran were also coming to San Diego in August. It ended up being a perfect way to plan a party around their visit!





Now I know that the Riel family can host many parties of all different kinds, so of course I had NO doubt that Birdy would knock it out of the park! She helped with the decorations/games, and my mom did the food/drinks. I chose a lemon/Italian themed shower (suited well with the home decor), we had a delicious Italian lunch, and Karin Sorem made her staple pie cookies! A perfect team of women to create such a fun day. We ate first, played a couple games, unwrapped gifts, and slowly said our good-byes. At the same time, Brett and some of the guys got to have a little shower too at a local brewery. He didn't complain.



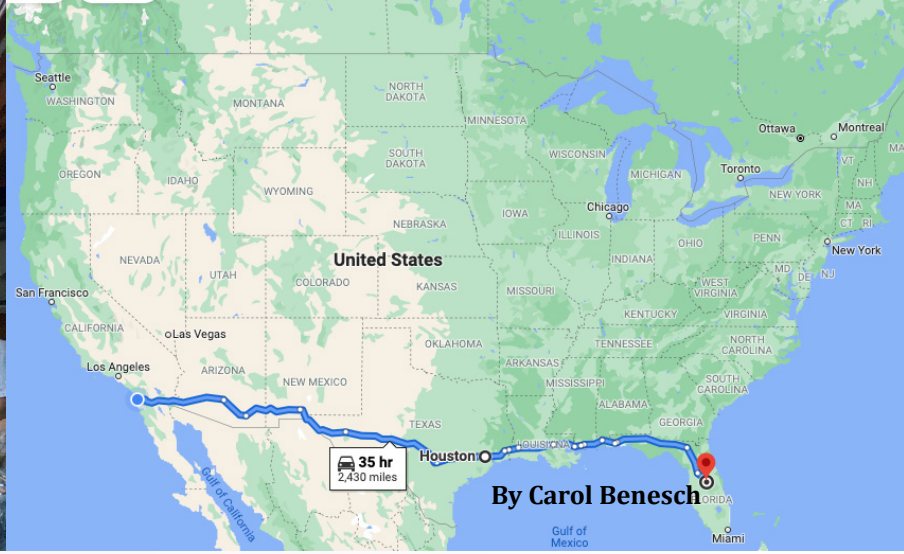
Because of Covid and not having the opportunity to see a lot of people, it made my heart so happy to smile, laugh, and enjoy this sweet time with so many close family and friends that came. All were vaccinated! I also received some awesome gifts, including a knitted baby blanket by Karin Sorem. Brett and I don't have anything to pass down like that to Aro so that was special.

Huge thanks to Birdy for hosting a beautiful and memorable shower! Thank you again for the gifts to help Brett and I prepare as new parents. We feel incredibly grateful!



We can't wait for Aro to arrive and be loved by all of you soon!





Cross Country Road Trip in Harvey the RV Jessica, Carol, Ben, Sofie, Matty & Shelby

Day 1 Thursday 8/12

Packed up and ready to head back to New Jersey, with a side trip to Orlando Florida's Disney World, Jessica, Ben, Sofie, Matty, Shelby and I began our cross-country trip. We left Santee Lakes at 7:20am

10:20 Yuma, Arizona state line.

3:00 Saguaro National Park, Red Hills Visitor Center (Jr. Ranger pledge, badge, hike...)

3:40 Tucson Mountain Park for a quick stop and a few more pictures!

5:00 Our first night at Lazydays KOA Tucson. Great KOA, swam, BBQ, great playroom with a 4-way ping pong table, climbing wall, lots of board games. We played Life, which was a first for the kids and we all had a blast. "Do I want this job that pays more or one I love, 1 kid or many, expensive house..." It was a fun first night!



Day 2 Friday 8/13

7:00 Left Tucson

10:20 New Mexico State Line

1:50 Texas State line

2:55 Hueco State Park and Historic Site, TX. We arrived with flash flood warnings for El Paso. Miguel and Jeff were on weather watch. Miguel called the park ahead of time to make sure it was safe. The ranger assured us we would be on high ground and safe. As soon as we pulled in the rain came down! Trying to back in the RV was a bit tricky and a very wet job, but we did it! We got lots and lots of rain, but not the flooding that El Paso got!! It was a good choice. Spent the evening indoors singing songs and playing games.

Day 3 Saturday 8/14

7:00 Hueco is a Spanish word meaning hollows and refers to the many water-holding depressions in the boulders and rock faces throughout the area. We wanted to see some of the history, so we did the hike in the rain, on a path that was flooded. We walked through water that went up to our ankles and around a lagoon where the mosquitos welcomed us with opened mouths!! We saw lots of cool rocks with paintings and unfortunately graffiti as well.

10:45 Left Hueco, very excited for our trip today to Carlsbad Caverns

12:30 Guadalupe Mountains State Park. Beautiful short hike in a beautiful area!!

1:30 Back in New Mexico

2:00 Arrived in White City so excited to see the caverns. BUT that wasn't going to happen, the road was closed due to the amount of rain from the day before and flash flood warnings for today. The excitement went to 5 VERY disappointed travelers. We spent the afternoon drowning our sorrows in the gift shop and the café. We then had to decide whether to chance staying another night in hopes of no more rain or continue on without seeing the caverns. White City was a block of nothing, so we cancelled our night stay there, drove back to the city of Carlsbad and booked a night at Carlsbad KOA. We also decided, since we drove out of our way to see the caverns, and it hadn't rain so far, we would take our chances, rearrange our schedule and try the cavern's the next day.

3:00 Carlsbad KOA had another great playground with a tetherball/basketball/gaga ball pit, and another indoor playroom with foosball, darts, games etc. The kids introduced me to gaga ball, it would have been much more fun for me, if the pit wasn't flooded, and I introduced tether ball to them. They loved tetherball and played it for a long time! A nice little, much needed, wine break for Jessica and me.

Day 4 Sunday 8/15

Great news! The expected flash flood did not happen, and the park was open again and they would honor all reservations from the day before. Our reservations were for the afternoon, so we took our time, had a nice breakfast, did some laundry, and read about the bat caves. The excitement mounted again, and we kept our fingers crossed until we entered the park!!

11:30 Arrived at the information center which is huge, more like a museum, café and gift MALL!! We were anxious to get into the caverns, so we ate a quick lunch and headed down into the cave. It is a 2-3 hour walk down, (3 hour, if you take a million pictures) thankfully there is an elevator that takes you up.

All I can say was, I was so glad to get to go into the cavern's, it was amazing. We took some extra time walking down due to my many pictures stops and to just stare at the views. We had a great time, but we all thought we would see some bats. Unfortunately, you don't see them in the cavern, you must wait until 7:00pm to watch them fly out.

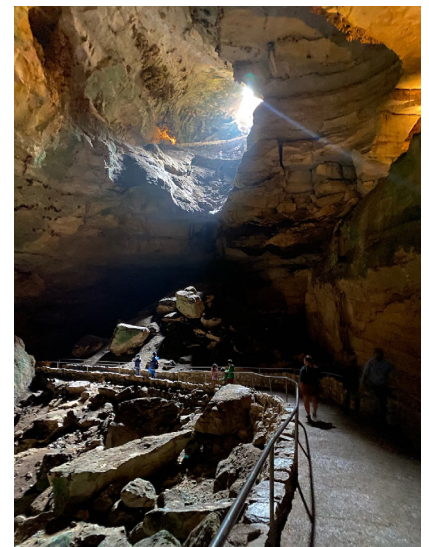
We spent the rest of the day doing the Jr. Ranger books, hiking a bit, relaxing a bit and then went into panic mode because the center closed at 5, the kids wanted to get their patches, our watches said 4:45, it felt like 3:45, but we trusted our watches just in case. We rushed back to the info center to find out that the time zone signal is in Texas and often that signal is stronger than theirs, so we had an extra hour to walk around again. We laughed at ourselves for not knowing the time, we were truly on vacation, but the kids finished their books, did their pledges got their patches and we went back to the RV. We had some dinner and then went back to see the bats.



7:00 We listened to the ranger talk, watched thousands of tiny bats swarm out, which to me, looked more like a dark cloud moving around, but the really cool part was when an owl swooped out a few times and enjoyed a bat meal. No pictures because cameras/phones are not allowed. It was neat night experience, except we were going to have to drive to our next destination in the dark!



9:00 We decided to drive until we got sleepy. That sounded ok to me at the time, the kids fell asleep so it was nice and quiet, and I could help Jessica navigate. That was good until we turned on to this very dark (NM doesn't do streetlights) one lane, dirt road!! I was sure we were lost and would end up at a dead end, but Jessica kept assuring me that not all roads are like California roads. I think she was just lying to keep me calm. This road was 24 miles long, but to me it felt like 100 miles. It was dark, it was late, and we were on a deserted road, the only building we saw for miles looked like a state penitentiary, ugh! We did make it, and once we entered Texas the road became more like a freeway and less like an old stage coach road haha.



11:45 Pecos Texas, Walmart parking lot!!! We reached our limit, it was late, no RV places around and Jessica said it's okay to stay in Walmart's parking lot if you are gone before it opens. Needless to say, I did not sleep well, lots of car noise, sirens, not the normal quiet campsite but at 6 am Jessica was up and had already gone into Walmart to get ice and a few other needed items and we were ready to go. Good bye Pecos!!!





Day 5 Monday 8/16

6:30 Left Pecos Texas!!!!

9:26 Texas...1,212 miles and we are halfway to Disney World!!!

10:30 Stopped in Sonora TX to run the kids and the dog!!

12:30 DQ for lunch, a traveling tradition! No better way to beat the heat and have dessert for lunch!

2:30 Another needed break, A stop at Target to get school supplies. Jessica wanted to make sure she had everything in place in case they didn't have time when they got back. Besides we needed to get out and stretch.

3:00 I finally gave Jessica a break and drove the RV!! It was only an hour and a half, on a nice straight highway, but I did it and it wasn't too bad. I would have gone farther, but it started to rain, and I didn't want driving lessons in the rain.

4:30 KOA San Antonio, Texas. Set up the RV, kids played at the playground, and then we tried to cool down a bit, It was 95 and sticky hot!

5:00 We Ubered into the city and walked the Riverwalk! It was very cool, like a little Venice. We ate a nice dinner at Mad Dogs, a British Pub. After dinner we took a boat trip through the river walk with a great guide and learned all about the history of the area.

9:00 Walked to the Alamo, took pictures and listened in to some of the many tours going on. I'm guessing the tours are at night because it would be way too hot to do them during the day! It was only around 80 degrees now and pleasant.

10:00 Ubered back to the RV and crashed!



Day 6 Tuesday 8/17

8:00 On our way to Houston

11:00 Arrived in Tomball, Houston at Jessica's friend's house. They met working at Continental Airlines and have remained close friends. Dabney and her husband and 2 adorable kids had lunch waiting for us. After lunch we played for a little bit in the back yard, but it was so hot we decided to go to their community pool.

2:00 As soon as we walked up to the pool, they closed it because they could hear thunder and there were some huge rain clouds forming. With 5 very disappointed kids, we went back to Dabney's house and the kids jumped on the trampoline, squirted each other with the hose, and played, while we sipped on wine and fed the mosquitos... again!! I hate mosquitos!

4:00 We headed to our campsite, a FREE state park with hook ups! We planned to have Dabney and family over for burgers, campfire and S'mores. After we put out all the chairs, and outside games, got the BBQ set up and going, that huge cloud decided to open up and pour. We moved everything out of the rain and moved into the RV. It was a bit crowded, but the kids loved playing in the bed over the cab. We had a nice dinner and managed to have S'mores thanks to the microwave!



Day 7 Wednesday 8/18

5:00 We had a long drive ahead of us, so Jessica got up very early, got everything unhooked and was going to start driving while the kids slept. One little problem, state parks do not unlock gates until 6 (thank goodness it wasn't 8) We got a little later start than hoped, but we were on the road watching a beautiful sunrise with the sun peeking through clouds making a rainbow of colors!



9:20 Louisiana State line!! We drove through Baton Rouge headed to New Orleans, Ben's choice stop! He loves fedoras and jazz music and really wanted to check out "the home of jazz and fedoras!" We crossed some amazing, and very long bridges and were on alligator watch, but all we saw was swampy water. We drove around Lake Pontchartrain, if we had driven across the lake we could have gone on the longest bridge in the US, it is 24 miles long.

4:00 After forging many down pours and long bridges we made it to New Orleans!! We stayed at The French Quarters RV Resort. It was close enough to the French Quarters that we could walk. It was a nice resort, but the cement wall with barbed wire was a bit intimidating. At 5:00 pm it was still very muggy and hot, but we walked to the French Quarters, and looked around, then headed to Woldenberg Riverfront Park on the Mississippi. It was a beautiful area, just humid and hot. Louisiana was very strict with their COVID rules. We had to show our vaccine card to get into restaurants and of course we wore our masks all around anyway. It was nice to know that everyone eating with us had been vaccinated. We had our most relaxing and expensive meal of the trip trying all the local favorites, gumbo, shrimp creole, boudin balls and grits, drinks and dessert! After dinner we walked down glitzy Canal St and shopped for the perfect fedora for Ben. We found one and then headed back to Bourbon St, the heart of New Orleans

French Quarter to check out the night life. Not too many kids there and after a few blocks we knew why. Ben and Matty did get into the spirit and started dancing to the music!



9:00 We headed back to the RV very tired and ready to end the day. As we were walking back, we passed a cemetery that looked old and creepy. Sofie does not like anything remotely scary and when it's dark, she is even more scared. As we are walking by, Ben says, "That looks just like St. Louis Cemetery 1 and 2!!" In



his excitement, he starts telling us about this cemetery that he read about in his ghost book that is the oldest and most famous graveyard and he was sure it was in Louisiana. It has fancy family vaults, and lots of history including voodoo priestess Marie Laveau! I had no idea what he was talking about, but Sofie heard ghost and graveyard and she freaked out, Matty was done walking and we still had about a half mile left. The last little bit felt like 10 miles, but we made it back to the RV and everyone fell right to sleep!

Day 8, Thursday 8/19

8:00 You can't go to Louisiana without having a beignet breakfast. We decided to spend a few more hours exploring before leaving. Ben, of course, got his book out and verified his facts and sure enough, he was right, (I was amazed that put 2 and 2 together) the 2 graves were indeed, St Louis Cemetery 1 & 2. He had to see them, so we walked by. They were not as scary in the daylight, but Sofie still wanted nothing to do with them. They were closed and you could only go in them if you went on a tour, so we continued on in search of beignets. We ended up back in the French Quarter, much quieter in the daytime, and found a very cute café, Café Beignet. We not only had beignet, which were my favorites, but an assortment of other pastries. Needing to walk off our breakfast. We walked to the French Quarter Visitor Center and our 3 Jr Rangers got their passports stamped and their books to do for a badge. Then it was back to the RV for our last leg of the trip!!

11:45 By noon we were driving through Mississippi

1:20 Alabama State line

2:45 Crossed Florida State Line!! We wanted to go as far as possible so we could make it to Disney Fort Wilderness early. We drove all day, well Jessica drove most of it but I did my token 2 hours and we made it to Madison.

8:15 Madison Golf and Country Club added an RV park to their facility. It was new and nice!! It even had pickleball courts!! The owners were very nice and are hoping people will come and vacation at their new resort. The place was very clean, the bathroom/showers were brand new, very clean and private!! We had a nice dinner, a campfire with girl scout leader Jessica and helper Sofie leading us in camp songs, S'mores and an amazing lighting show without rain!!

10:00 We went to sleep very excited knowing we were only 3 hours away from Disney World!

Day 9 Friday 8/20

8:00 Left Madison and headed toward Orlando

12:00 Drove around Disney World a few times before we could figure out how to get to our campsite. But the drive was filled with giggles from 3 very excited kids! The familiar shouts, "I see castle, rocky mountain...made me remember the nickel contest when we were little. We pulled into Fort Wilderness and got all checked in. We got our wristbands, a welcome kit and headed to our site. We got set up and went out exploring. Within the first 5 minutes we saw wild turkeys, deer, and many lizards with curly tails. We headed to the pool and the kids enjoyed a huge tunnel slide and made lots of friends. Then came the lightning...again, and they closed the pool. We decided to walk back instead of taking a shuttle. We walked in the pouring rain being glad that we did not have to get back on the road again for a week.

4:00 Jeff and Miguel arrive!!!

By Jeff Benesch



The Rios/Benesch Clan Does



WALT DISNEY WORLD

After Jessica, Carol and the Rios kids drove the width of the country in 8 days in Harvey the RV, they finally safely arrived on Friday, 8/20, at Fort Wilderness, the huge Disney World RV Park about 5 miles from the Magic Kingdom. Miguel and Jeff flew into the Orlando Airport that night and made their way to meet the rest of the gang at FW.

Over the next 7 very eventful days, we saw deer, wild turkeys, a slew of white Ibises, and a single ferocious alligator right near the pool. (Alright, the young alligator was about 15" long) And this was just in the RV Park. What we didn't find, despite hot and humid weather, and lots of standing water, pesky mosquitoes. I don't know how they do it, but Disney has a system to mitigate the little buggers, and it works! We went to 5 parks in 7 days, including Disney's Animal Kingdom on Saturday, the Magic Kingdom on Sunday, Hollywood Studios on Tuesday, Epcot on Wednesday, and back to the Magic Kingdom on Thursday. No mosquitoes.

While we got rain nearly every night, we avoided storms at all the parks except one, and that was close to leaving time. Miguel spent a few days getting the RV ready for the return trip to New Jersey, and making sure that Shelby, the wonder dog, was well taken care of. He did join us a couple of the days at the parks, and thoroughly enjoyed Disney's Epcot, as did we all. We also had great luck with lines and waiting times with only a couple of waits longer than 30 minutes, with many rides allowing the kids to get on a second and third time with no waiting. So, to review, no mosquitoes, little rain, and relatively short lines. The only downside was the oppressive heat (90+) and humidity most days, but we dealt with it, and loved the inside of air-conditioned rides and attractions and the fact that everyone was masked up once inside any ride. Food was expensive and relatively unhealthy (lots of burgers and fries), but Miguel prepared sandwiches and dropped them off to us on several days, which helped.

We all had fans and refillable water bottles, but Disney World is very inconsistent with the availability of refill stations. They REALLY want you to buy the \$4.00 waters and sodas! Staying hydrated in the heat was a real challenge.

The best thing about Fort Wilderness is its large lake and the nice dock and shuttle craft we used to get to the main Disney World Park. It was a less than 15-minute boat ride, with very short wait times, nice views of many, many aquatic birds, and a drop off which was right at the front gate of the Magic Kingdom. Since we went to the main park on two of our days, and also used the boats to access the transfer to the Epcot monorail, it was quite convenient. Miguel even used the boats to deliver our lunches on a couple of occasions. An added plus is you could see and hear the nightly fireworks show from the edge of the lakefront. One thing that is NOT comforting are the many lakeside signs warning of snakes and alligators.

Here's a brief rundown of the rides and attractions that were rated most popular by our group at large: Please note that we developed a "barf rating system" for most of the fast or nausea-inducing rides. So, if something was deemed "high barf expectation", Grampy avoided, or at least complained about those rides the most. It was a sadistic pleasure that the kids got trying to get Grampy on the worst stomach-churners in each park.it

Disney's Animal Kingdom: Expedition Everest was a high-speed coaster similar to the Matterhorn at Disneyland. Since there is NO Matterhorn at Disney World, this is the closest thing. While the kids loved it, Grandpa found it somewhat high on the barf meter, but bravely went on this monster anyway. No harm, no foul.



Avatar, Flight of Passage was a 3-d flight simulator that, if you saw the movie Avatar, put you on the back of a banshee (flying dragon basically) for a stupendously exhilarating up and down flight along the coast of the Saturn moon Pandora. It was everyone's favorite ride, including old Barfy himself, in the whole park! Worth going on twice!



Ben and Grampy headed out to ride a bumpy tour bus through the savannah and plains of the Africa and Asia on the Kilimanjaro Safari, which includes REAL lions, gnus, giraffes, water buffalo, rhinos and much more. It was like a much smaller version of the Wild Animal Park Wgasa safari ride of yesteryear. But pretty neat, nonetheless. We all got a little wet on the Kali River Rapids, and thoroughly enjoyed the Bird Show, and the Tree of Life attraction that is the center theme of the entire park. 4 thumbs up for our first day's adventure!



Disney's Hollywood Studios: We got there right at opening to sprint to Slinky Dog Dash, a highly rated ride with usually long lines. We got on relatively quickly, but I'd say it was a fairly mild roller coaster that didn't bother the squeamish among us at all.

Among the rides that WERE avoided by the squeamish were the Rock n Roll Coaster and also the Twilight Zone Tower of Terror. Big favorites among the kids, Jessica and Grammly, some rode them more than once. The big attraction at this park is of course, Galaxy's Edge, Starwars Land. We had to make a reservation for the most popular ride in the park, Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance. But before our mid-afternoon time for that ride, we managed to ride Star Tours and the brand-new Millennium Falcon: Smugglers Run. Both a lot of fun for all, but the big feature of this section of the park is the Full-Sized replica, and very real looking, Millennium Falcon. We were all Star Wars nerds for most of the day, everyone wore their Star Wars Themed t-shirts, and we even had a small meal and drinks at Oga's Cantina, set up to look like the bar in Mos Eisley. \$\$\$\$



For those that haven't yet visited either of the Star Wars lands in Florida or Anaheim, we just have to relate a bit about Rise of the Resistance without spoiling it for the uninitiated. It was the longest, most interactive, and fun experience you can have



in any amusement park. It's like 3 rides in one, and you really feel like you're caught in the middle of a battle between the First Order and the Resistance. If you've never seen the movie, shame on you:-) But let's just say this ride is well worth the wait and hassle of the appointment thing, (you jump on your devices at 7 AM to secure a spot) and was much more detailed and involved than we expected! And loved by all of us.

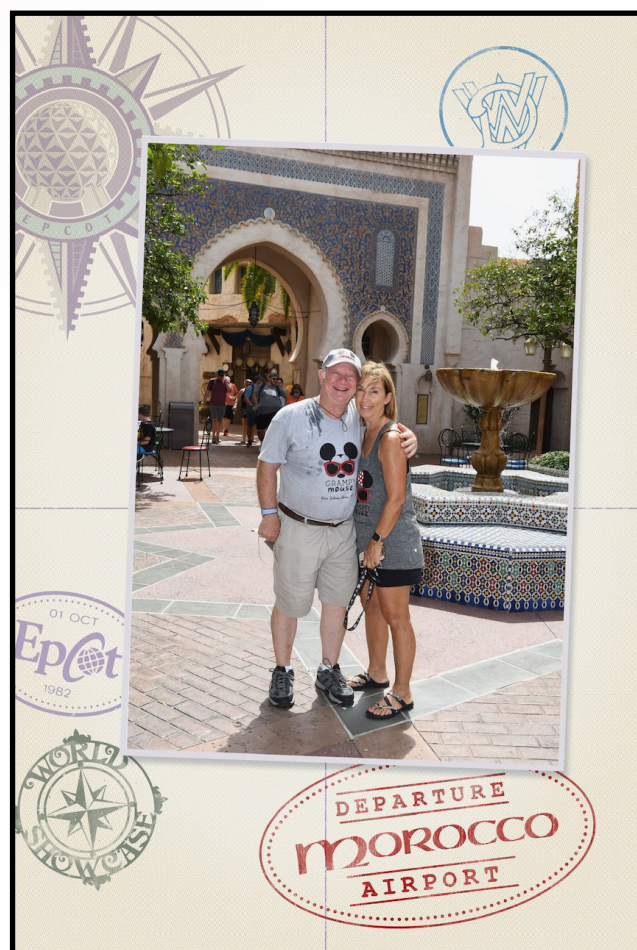
Epcot: For a park that we really didn't know too much about, Epcot was the biggest surprise! There was a couple of great things about Epcot that got everyone excited!

Much of Epcot is a huge lake which is surrounded by the "World Showcase". This is a series of small "towns" which represent countries around the world. There was an international food and wine festival featured at all the various national areas which largely sold small portions of food and drink from that country. So, for about \$5.00 you could get a "taster plate" of a food specific to that region. And most also had wines, beers or spirits for sale to compliment your "taster plate". We had a series of lunches and early dinners as we made our way around the lake. Some were better than others.

The Park also created a game for kids where they attempted to find a "hidden" figure of Remy, the rat, who starred in the 2007 animated film "Ratatouille". A 6" tall Remy figure was in 10 or 12 different locations in a variety of countries and their little "villages". And Remy was always with a cooking implement, like a saltshaker, a spoon, a loaf of bread, etc. And he was generally on a roof, in a window, in a garden, etc. The kids had a work sheet with stickers which had to be transferred when they found Remy and the kitchen items. Rather than be bored by our wandering in shops and attractions, they had a game to perk their interest. Brilliant.

Epcot did have a series of rides which we also enjoyed, both in the Showcase area, and in the entrance plaza and its environs. The kids knew about Test Track, a ride which exceeded 60 MPH. It was very clever, whereby teams of 3 designed a car which could go fast, look very sporty and yet be fuel efficient. You then "raced" your car against others and received a score at the end. Great ride.

Other rides of note at Epcot were the Spaceship Earth which explored the evolution of technology over the years, and Mission: Space, an Astronaut training exercise. Now we had a couple of choices when entering this ride:



The green side was gentle and for all ages and ride tolerances. The ORANGE side had warnings that you might experience some discomfort. Grampy had some grave misgivings when talked into going on the ORANGE side with everyone else. Grampy's anxiety deepened when they strapped us into our own training module, and the barf bags appeared! (to use as necessary). So, we blasted off, and somehow, they spun us around and gave us the sensation that we had landed on Mars. The "barf meter" was off the charts as we wobbled off this ride. Kids loved it, however.

We also loved the "Soaring Around the World" where one went parasailing over many notable world sites such as the pyramids, the alps, the Eiffel Tower, Taj Mahal, Great Wall, Grand Canyon, and so forth. No nausea and no complaints after this visually stunning ride. What was neat about Epcot and made it different from many other parks, was that some of the rides exited through an interactive play and exploration area instead of a gift shop. Don't think they didn't have a million different shops in Epcot, but we appreciated these play and explore areas greatly, and the air conditioning they provided as well.



One ride, Turtle Talk with Crush, was a slow ride in a clam shell which featured the characters from Finding Nemo, and ended at the SeaBase, a very large (almost 6 million gallons) aquarium with real sharks, sea turtles, large sea bass, tunas and groupers, manatees, octopi, eels and other sea creatures of varying sizes and colors. Our day at Epcot ended with a fantastic Fireworks display, Epcot Forever, right over the lake in front of us.

Disney's Magic Kingdom: We spent 2 days at the Magic Kingdom, and it compared favorably to our own Disneyland in many ways. Our first objective was to "run" to the Seven Dwarves Mine Train which we were warned would have long lines later in the day. Needless to say, it was underwhelming to most of us. We did have more luck (and fun) on Big Thunder Mountain Railway, Pirates of the Caribbean, The Haunted House, Space Mountain, and Jungle Cruise.



But our big adventure was Splash Mountain, which is like the California ride of the same name, but a bit shorter. And after the big drop at the end of the ride, we circled around to the exit dock, only to stop about 100 feet short. And we waited, and waited, and waited. Until they announced the ride was broken and crews would assist us in exiting each boat. That wasn't a quick process in that people were also stuck at the top of the ride. Finally, after about 25 minutes of just sitting in our boat, they came with a tool that unlocked the safety lap bar and then helped each of us out of the boat, and thru the emergency exit. We were cautioned to not take any "backstage" pictures, but we did get to see the non-public area behind the ride. It's not so "magic" as the front of the rides, streets and promenades. They gave us a cold-water bottle and a fast pass for our inconvenience.



The second day we explored Tom Sawyer's Island, and



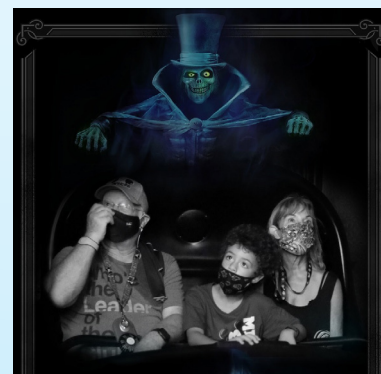
the fort which we remembered when we were kids, would fire onto the boats circling the island. They don't feature that part anymore, but the kids all loved shooting the canons and pretend guns out of the fort at the Thunder Mountain train ride and the island, we spent a lot of time there. Some of the rides getting second and 3rd visits because of the short lines were Space Mountain, Big Thunder Mountain, and Splash Mountain. We made sure to visit the Monsters Inc Laugh Floor, which is in a Tomorrowland theatre, and is an interactive comedy show featuring characters from the Monster's Inc franchise. We were allowed to submit jokes and riddles pre-show, and one of Sofia's was included in the show. Also, they would put a camera on various audience members, and ask them silly questions to stoke an audience response and laughter. Grampy was picked in one of these live streamed jokes and performed without too much humiliation.



Lastly, at about 8:45 PM, Main Street is filled with people wanting a good view of the Happily Ever After fireworks and light show. They projected lots of animated images onto the front of Sleeping Beauty's Castle, played loud themed music, and sent off nearly 700 explosive shells in a scintillating display that was very impressive. The last night, Jessica, Carol, and the kids got a close-up spot near the castle while Grampy caught the show from the deck of the just departing shuttle boat, it was totally awesome to see the show all the way back to the Fort Wilderness Dock.

On Friday AM, Carol and Jeff returned the rental car and flew home to San Diego. The Rios clan left Florida for New Jersey and arrived safely home in Edison 2 days later.

Jessica and Miguel returned to their Nursing and Firefighting, and the kids began the school year. And Shelby, the wonder dog, is undoubtedly happy to be home.





Kieran Meets His West Coast Relatives!

On Sunday, August 22, the Gillinghams hosted an afternoon party to introduce Keiran to many of his “long distance” relatives from and around San Diego. It was a warm afternoon with plenty of hugs, kisses and photos taken with the guest of honor.

Everyone brought their own food but there was plenty of swimming and pickle ball to work off the food. Brett and Bryce showed off their athleticisms by picking up the sport in no time, giving Listy and Birdy a run for their money in a doubles match.

It was a fun afternoon, and everyone was very happy to meet Kieran. Thanks to Listy and Bob for once again, opening their home up for another Riel gathering.







The Frank And Sam Update

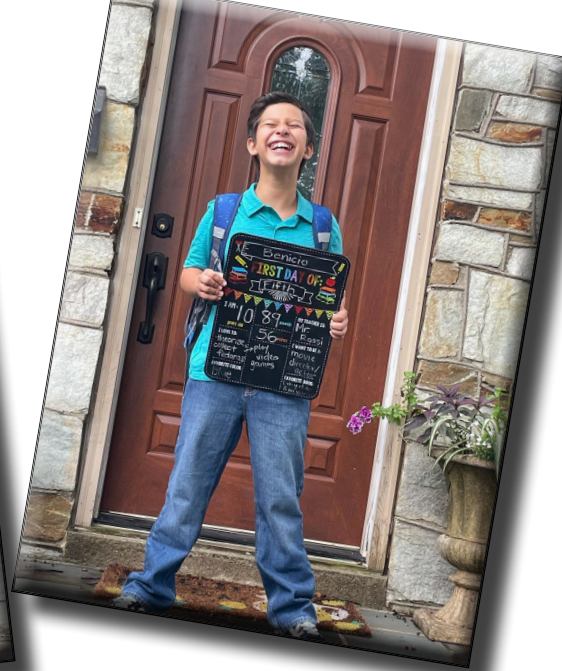
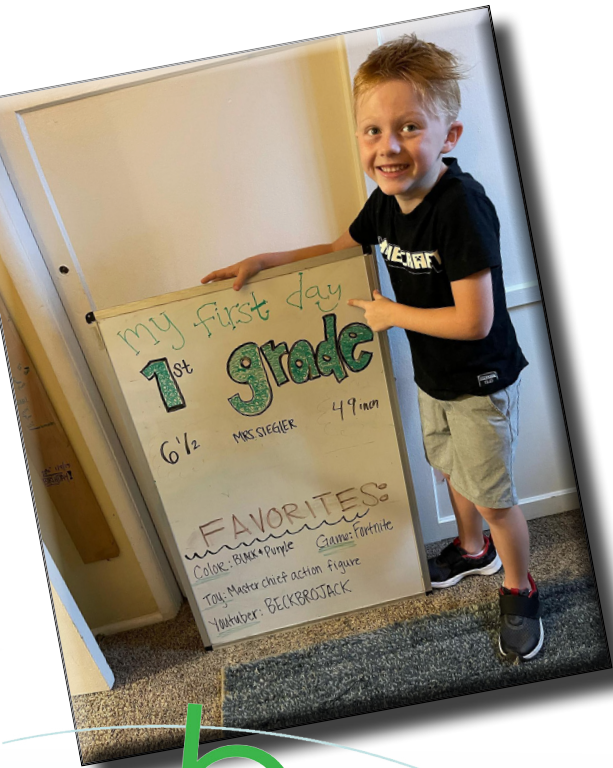
By Frank Riel

Hi family it has been a while since our last update. Last year in October, Sam and I moved into a new 3-bedroom house that we are renting in Del Cerro, 5614 Charter Avenue San Diego, CA, 92120. Only weeks after would I be offered a store manager position at CVS in Solana Beach. This meant a whole new way of life for us with me working much more.

While I have been very busy as a store manager my incredibly talented and intelligent wife was accepted to St. Augustine University where she is currently working towards her doctorate in physical therapy. I have been recently promoted again to a new store located 8915 Towne Center Drive in La Jolla. Just recently we visited Phoenix this past July to take a break from it all and see some sights. While we were there, we got to see some familiar faces (Brian and Drew) for a delicious and awesome night.

Sam would soon inform me that we were about to start on an even greater adventure. She is now three months pregnant with our first child which we are very excited to announce to the family and the world. We can't wait to be parents and embark on the next chapter.





back to school

