



The Family's Newest Member Arrives Just in Time for Christmas

(But not too soon!)



By Annie Mulholland

The Mulhollands Get an Early Christmas Present (Again!!!)

We are now a family of four! McKenzie Claire Mulholland was born December 23rd at 9:23 am, weighing in at 6 pounds, 11 ounces. We already know she will be a great sister to Evie because she waited patiently until midnight on the 22nd, Evie's birthday, to begin her journey into the world. Needless to say, the party is at our house in December!

Labor and delivery went relatively smoothly for this one. One of the perks (if there are perks) of having a baby during Covid is the hospitals are just as anxious to get you out as you are to get home. We were able to be discharged within 24 hours of delivery and be home for Christmas Eve.





Kevin's parents and sister came out for Christmas and, more importantly, to meet the new baby. They were also able to watch Evie while we were in the hospital. Evie loved having all the extra attention and I think that helped with the invasion of a new baby into our home. Evie was so excited when she first met McKenzie. I think she thought we bought her a really realistic baby doll for Christmas (we're such great parents). She has loved giving the baby kisses, "petting"

the baby and pointing out that she has eyes, a nose, a mouth, etc.

Now, we are just getting used to being responsible for two human beings and all that comes with it. We are oh so in love with little McKenzie and soaking up the baby snuggles because we know they grow up fast! Also, counting down the days until we can synchronize their nap times!! It's the little things. :) Happy New Year!



Christmas Staycation for the Riel/Mehans

By Margaret Riel



Our Christmas gift to the kids has traditionally been travel. But a combination of Co-Vid and school schedules made planning travel difficult this year. Emily and Ashley did not get out of school on Christmas Eve. So, we planned a staycation. Megan arrived home just before Christmas, and we all had a sleepover at Michael and Ashley's so that Santa could find us all together. We played with toys and Megan made us Christmas Dinner. On Sunday, we become tourists in San Diego. Unfortunately, our week of touring was also the only week all year that had daily forecasts of rain.



We started our adventures with a SEAL boat tour. (Many of you will know this as a "duck boat," basically a small bus that drives on roads and then drives into the bay.) So, we got a short history of downtown San Diego followed by a tour of the bay which is way larger than we had thought. The highlight of the tour is circling platoons that are filled with bait that fishermen can come and scoop out. The seals and birds find easy access to leftovers and a convenient island for sunbathing.



The military controls much of the bay. And we saw aircraft carriers that made the cruise ships look like toys in the harbor. There was a strange cylinder boat that did not look anything like a boat. And who knew that the Navy-Marine Mammal Program at the Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command (SPAWAR) trains 85 dolphins and 50 sea lions. The military working with SeaWorld had invested millions in training these animals. Apparently, the program first started in 1960 when the Navy studied Notty, a female Pacific white-sided dolphin. The Navy hoped to study the dolphin's biomechanics for ideas for developing faster torpedoes. But when they discovered how smart the dolphins were, they quickly changed the focus to covert training of dolphins for sea tasks, much like they use dogs on land. Dolphins are trained to locate and neutralize mines moored in deep water and to find safe lanes for Marine assault vehicles and crafts to travel. Sea Lions are trained to retrieve submerged objects. Both can find and capture enemy divers.





Then we moved to Old Town for the Tacos, Tequila, Tombstone Tour. The food and drink was good but the tour was a bit on the weak side. The tour guide seemed more concerned with where people were buried than the more interesting facts of their lives. But for both these tours, we were lucky that the amount of rain that fell on us was minimal.



Monday was our Jungle Bells tour of the San Diego Zoo. In many ways, the rain helped us as it kept most of the people away. There were no crowds and we only had one short sprinkle on the way to the restaurant. We enjoyed a three-course late afternoon meal which included VIP viewing of the light show in the evening. There were performances, music, and lights all around the zoo. We had front row seats in the animal-themed Night Before Christmas, hosted by Dr. Zoolittle because we were one of two families waiting for the show to start. We all got musical instruments to be part of the show. The orb people, a preshow for the Aurora 2021 light show, had very few children to talk to so Emily and Addy were taught special dance steps by the keeper of the wind and fire and were given messages to take to the characters to earn their superpower. For the show, we had a row of seats with no one in front or behind us which made us feel protected from any stray virus floating around.

The next day should have been preparing for a birthday party for Emily but it turned out that Addy close friend and table mate at school tested positive for co-vid so her birthday party was postponed at first for a few weeks and now, since a number of the families that she would like to invite has col-vid, until people are well. We did have a family birthday party to mark the day and then went to see the Christmas lights at Del Mar. Going after Christmas makes so much more sense as there were no long car lines, and we could drive through the displays at our own pace enjoying the lights in contrast to the complete darkness around us.

Even though Addy continued to test negative, we postponed other tours as we needed to keep her home for a few days. Whale-watching and Legoland will just have to wait till there is better weather and lower co-vid numbers. We did, however, have fun playing miniature golf (in a light drizzle). At night the adults enjoyed their annual competitions of board games.

Even though co-vid and rain dampened things a bit, we celebrated together enjoying San Diego and family.



Kevin and Nichole's New Home



By Ed Riel

As I sit here on a Wednesday night typing these lines, rested, and contented after finishing a scrumptious Nicole prepared dinner of pork chops, potatoes and a delicious root vegetable I don't even know the name of, I can't help but feel sorry for Kevin and his brother Nathan who are both, dinnerless and still working at the new house running in a new electrical wire for a kitchen fan light. Ahh Home ownership.

As you all know Kevin and Nichole purchased a new home at 765 Cuyamaca Street in west El Cajon. The purchase is the easy part. A bit of a fixer upper it's been their focus-of-fun for the last couple of months. They have pretty much painted everything in the house that doesn't move

and somethings that do. They have become expert floor installers and Ikea assemblers. They are soon to refinish their old cast iron bathtub with some fancy Amazon purchased paint that you just pour on (we will let you know how that works).





All of this is in addition to both of them settling down into new jobs. It is an epic struggle; one in which they will look back on with pride on how they were able to accomplish so much, in such a short time, all without going crazy, or perhaps it will make them crazy, for nothing is certain in life except property taxes.



New Year's Eve at the Kieth's Home

By Listy Gillingham



The Keith Family decided to stay home for New Years and created a special day of activities for the troops since their planned celebration was not possible.

The kids woke up to a New Year's Poster with several balloons showing different times. They took turns popping the balloons and found in each one a task or challenge that they had to complete within the hour. The first challenge was a fitness one that included doing burpees, sit-ups, etc. They set up five stations and required the kids to do 4 seconds of work and then gave them 15 seconds to rotate to the next station. It sounded like the Keith boot camp to me! They continued throughout the day with lego challenges, hat making adventures, and plenty of cheering along the way. A perfect way to celebrate the New Year with their kids! Way to go Kristy and Seamus for creating a fun-filled celebration in a pandemic world that has gone crazy lately!



December Highlights from the Benesch's

By Carol and Jeff Benesch

December is one of my favorite months because there are so many fun, family holiday events and activities to do with our kids and grandkids. I always miss our far away families, but I'm thankful to have a local one.

This year we did the North County Holiday Express train with Jason and family and all of us had a good time. After Noah and Madeline's soccer games We headed up to Oceanside and boarded the train. We rode it to Solana Beach and then back to Oceanside. It was very well organized, and the kids were entertained the entire time.

As soon as the train took off, two funny elves greeted us and gave the kids a pen and paper to write their letter to Santa, then a visit from Santa, as well as Elsa and Ana, Carolers, goodie bags, and near the end, the elves came



to collect and mail their letters. Santa was great he sat at our seat with us and talked to the kids. Camden pulled his hat over his head, even though we had tried to prepare him for the visit, but at the very end, after his brother and sister told Santa what they were hoping for, he popped his head out and said "Cars, I would like cars". It was funny and very cute!! I already put this event on the calendar for next year...a fun time was had by all!



We also took a trip to SeaWorld and had a sleepover afterwards. The kids loved all the Holiday lights and special holiday shows. The fireworks were a great way to end the day. Once again, Camden's Santa hat came in handy, pulled down over his ears with just his eyes peeking out. He likes the bright lights, but not the loud booms!!! He makes us all laugh all the time!!

We came home, had some hot chocolate, read Christmas books and listened to Christmas carols as we fell asleep. The next day we decorated the bottom portion of our Christmas Tree along with some large gingerbread cookies. Much easier and tastier than gingerbread houses!!





Christmas Eve Day here, it was Christmas in New Zealand. We got to face time with the Kiwi's and see their new "Funky Monkey Bars" and other gifts that they got.



Early Christmas morning (4:15am) we face timed with the east coast grandkids and got to watch the Rios's open their gifts. Thank goodness for technology and Jessica and Miguel letting us be part of their Christmas morning we almost felt like we were there!

Then at 8:30am we went to Jason and Chavva's house to enjoy Christmas morning with them. Chavva made us a yummy breakfast and the kids loved all the fun that Christmas morning brings. We stayed with them until the early afternoon and then came back home to get ready for Christmas Dinner here. Jason and family came over at 4:00 for dinner and more presents. It was a fun filled day from start to finish!!

All of those fun times and shopping for gifts (online of course), baking cookies for the neighbors, Little Italy tree lighting, full moon Cowles Mountain hike, The Grinch, helping Noah with a fun Holiday project, and facetimeing lots with the other grandkids made this a great holiday month. It's always a little sad when it's time for the tree to come down, we're hoping next year includes more family get togethers and the return of the Riel Bowl! Love and good health wishes to all of our family, near and far!!



PLEASE JOIN US FOR A

Drive Through Baby Shower

HONORING THE
MOMMY- & DADDY-TO-BEE

Samantha & Frank Riel

SATURDAY

January



11AM - 12PM

Villa Monserate Park • 5728 Robusto Rd. SD 92124

In lieu of a card, please bring your favorite children's book.

Please contact Karin Davis at kdrd619@att.net
with any questions or concerns

The Riel's are registered at Babylist
www.babylist.com/baby-registry-samantha-riel



2022



THIS photo with Aro on 10/3 (minutes after he was born) was my highlight of 2021. The second photo was minutes before I was ready to start pushing. For the longest time, I wasn't really on the mom track. My goals were much different, and I was absolutely okay with the idea of not being a parent. It's funny how life works, and things change lol! The amount of love I have for my son, and my new outlook on life is an incredible feeling. It's both challenging and rewarding at the same time! I'm looking forward to seeing our family growing more together this new year. #2022