



Jeff and Carol Visit New Zealand

OUR 3 WONDERFUL WEEKS IN NEW ZEALAND



By Carol & Jeff Benesch

Jeff and Carol hadn't seen their NZ family, Dustin, Lauren, Holden, Grayson, Lawson and Paxton, in nearly 3 years because of Covid. So it was with great excitement that we drove up to LAX in early August to board our Air New Zealand jumbo jet. Because of the Int'l Date Line, we slept thru August 5th, and landed in Auckland on the 6th. Dustin picked us up and we made our way North to the Benesch home in Snell's Beach, about an hour away.

We spent the first few days hanging out in Snells, getting to know our 4 rambunctious grandsons after our long absence. We celebrated Paxton's 4th birthday soon after our arrival and all the boys were more than happy to share his gifts, cake and toys! Dusty proved to be a great and reliable chef the entire trip and our meals with this group were always a joyous production. The



early days around Snells Beach included day trips and hikes to nearby coastal communities and various bakeries, and a fantastic visit to a winery/sculpture garden where a moist fern forest and pastureland contained dozens of modern works of art of all sorts, some visually, and some auditory. Some bizarre shapes were head scratchers, but others were imaginative and awe inspiring. Quite the hike to say the least.

We left for our first of 3 out-of-area trips soon thereafter, up to the beautiful Bay of Islands, about 3½ hours North. The historic area, the first landing spot for Captain Cook in New Zealand, is revered by the Maori peoples for its rich warrior and spiritual history. We spent a wonderful day at the Waitangi Treaty Grounds where we experienced a Maori ceremonial house with authentic Maori dancing, chanting, singing, weaponry and costumes and learned the history of the first interactions between the European explorers and the native peoples. We got to see long boats used by the warring factions of the Maori tribes and visited the museum and gift shops full of Maori jewelry, weavings, and carved stone.

We enjoyed a day on the water, as we all boarded a tour boat to look for local dolphins, but instead got a close-up view of the outer islands of this historic bay, including an ancient light house, a group of fur seals, and a huge stone arch which we almost motored through.

Another of the features of our Northern trip was a visit to Sheep World, a fun petting zoo, full of sheep, lambs, emus, calves, pigs and other farm animals where we got to accompany a staff member as she fed all the animals and told us the background of each. Of course, the boys were thrilled they got to feed various animals their milk, oats, hay or pellets.

On our drive back home to Snells Beach, we stopped at a cave inhabited by a New Zealand oddity, the glow worm. These very small invertebrates, weave small stringy webs, and then glow to attract small insects. Almost invisible to the naked eye, these “worms” glow by the thousands in the darkened cave. So many of them are glowing on the ceiling of the cave, that it looked like a clear desert sky full of stars.

After a couple of days to restock at home, we headed south for a longer, and very memorable trek to Coromandel and the hot sand beach. This beautiful peninsula is best known for its dynamic ocean views and for us, the volcanic activity that





causes scalding water to flow off the cliffs and onto the beach. The trick is to take your small spade and dig your own personal “hot tub” that mixes the cool ocean water with the steamy heated stuff. If you do it right, and we did, you can luxuriate in a perfectly made pool, and we enjoyed our hot spa even in the rain. We enjoyed homemade meals in our “bach on the beach”. In New Zealand, vacation homes are called “Baches”, and many of them are rentals when unoccupied by the owners. Our baches were all unique, but each had its own charms and luxuries. (And some were well “lived-in”.)



Our next bach was located on the lake in a famous tourist area inland called Rotorua. This was a great, large, scenic home with a bonus: Ping pong, air hockey, and foosball tables in the garage, enjoyed by all. We had beautiful black swans in the back yard all the time, but until the last day, we also had rain and wind. That didn't keep us from enjoying many of Rotorua's best attractions. We went up a large lift to the top of a mountain, so we could ride luges down to the bottom, a great treat for our entire party. The luges were like go carts with no engines, but the wheels allowed the rider to really move down the various courses. We each got 5 rides down the hill, and there was considerable competition among us to see who was the fastest and most strategic to “win” the race down to the bottom. I would say that Dusty, Holden and Grayson definitely have the Benesch/Riel competitive gene, as there was some spirited jockeying to pass another rider.



We also visited a Redwood Forest, with huge trees, the tallest in New Zealand, that were imported decades ago as seedlings from California. The redwoods were outfitted with a series of stairs, platforms and bridges, so you walked several stories above the forest floor, from tree to tree and platform to platform. It was an awe-inspiring adventure. Most of the group also completed a longer hike through the redwoods, even though it drizzled throughout.



Another Rotorua attraction was a visit to Whakarewarewa Thermal preserve, where the highlights were geysers, stinky mud pools, and a group of Kiwis, rare birds that are normally only seen at night on preserves. But at this location, they had 3 young Kiwis, kept in a darkened enclosure, behind glass, and we all walked quietly and saw the birds running around among some native habitat. It was altogether an awesome experience. We visited another Maori cultural center that included a museum, an assembly hall, and the largest native art school in New Zealand. The school was amazing, and we got to see expert Maori stone and wood carvers, and weavers who created traditional clothing and decorations. The wood carving in particular was impressively detailed and large, with “totems” of spiritual and historic importance to Maori peoples.





Our last day in Rotorua was finally a clear, warm and dry day, and Lake Rotorua was inviting. We all went kayaking on the calm waters and spent much time with our slew of beautiful black swans. Carol, Lauren, and Holden took advantage of the clear skies and took a long 4 mile hike up Manngakkamea, Rainbow Mountain Scenic Reserve, and though a bit muddy, enjoyed an amazing view of all the beautiful lakes, lush green hills and the volcano that created Lake Rerewhakaaitu. It was a tough hike up but the views on top made it all worthwhile!!

We drove home for a last couple of days in Snells Beach, celebrated Holden's 11th birthday with much fanfare, before our tearful goodbyes, and many fond memories. In fact, we enjoyed our time in New Zealand and our family so much, we're going back with Jason's family in November.





Benesch Birthday Bash Month!!



By Carol & Jeff Benesch

August is our big birthday month! Starting off with Carol on the 2nd, Paxton on the 10th, Holden on the 22nd, Noah on the 25th, and ending with Jason on the 30!!! It used to be a little sad when my birthday rolled around because I knew work was about to begin and summer was almost over and there were a lot of birthday celebrations to fit in. Now that I'm retired, it is one of my favorite months!!

This year Jeff surprised me with a birthday dinner at Season's 52 including many of my best friends!! It was a really fun start to an August I will never forget!



A few days later we headed off on a much-anticipated trip to New Zealand. After a few days there, it was Paxton's 4th birthday. He loved waking up to balloons, noise makers, bubbles, and gifts!! After opening gifts Dustin made yummy french toast with added candles and we all sang to him as he blew out his candles.



We spent the rest of the day at Sheep World and finished the day with cake and ice cream. Another fun celebration.



Holden was next up, and his birthday came during our last day in Rotorua. We gave him a camera and a printer. We were amazed at his creativity in using the camera. For his birthday we went to the Hamilton Zoo, while it's not the San Diego Zoo, but still pretty cool! We ended the day with pizza, and a cake decorated by Holden!!



We flew back just in time to celebrate Noah's birthday on the 25th. He picked Panchos for dinner on his actual birthday. Then on the weekend (In Riel Style), he got to spend the day with us. We started the day at the Science Museum including the IMax Movie, "Into Americas Wild", lunch at El Indio and then a trip to Target to pick out a toy. It was a fun day!!

Then, to end the month, on Aug 30 we celebrated Jason's birthday by going out to dinner at Encanto in North Park. We also got to enjoy Noah's birthday party at Dave and Busters and a swim and cake and ice cream for both birthday boys back at their house afterward!

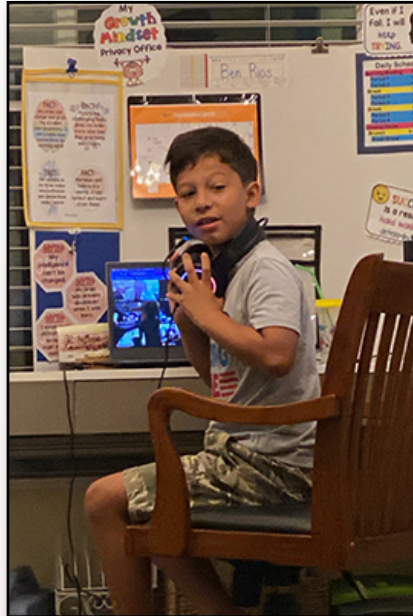
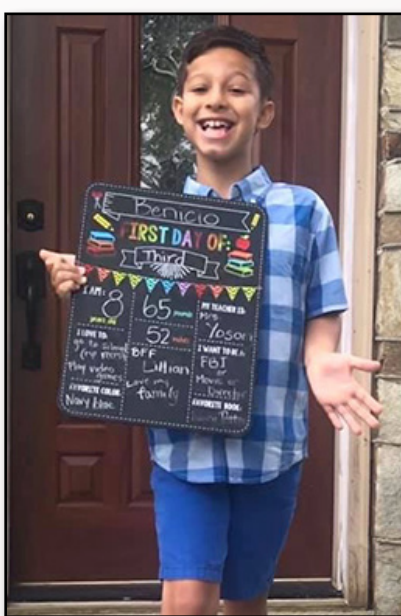
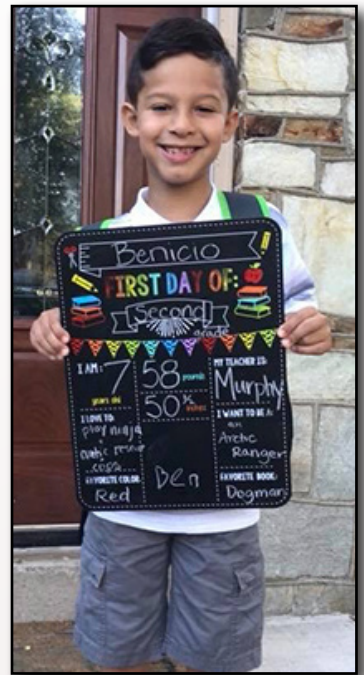
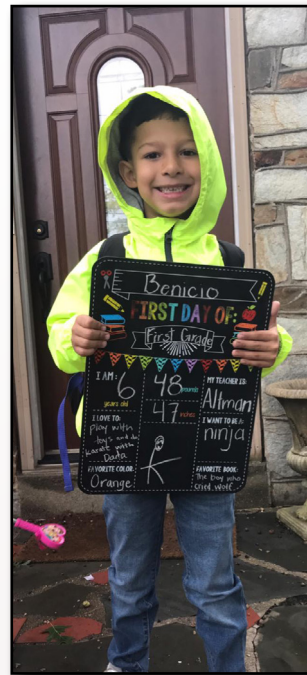
Our August was filled with family and lots of really good memories that I will cherish forever!!



Benicio Begins Middle School

It's hard to believe that our oldest grandson, Ben, (our little 4lb baby) is already 11 and starting Middle School!! The years just fly by!! We are very proud of all he has accomplished in elementary school and look forward to his accomplishments in Middle school!

By Carol & Jeff Benesch



Getting to know you—Great Grand Kiddos.

Ed to bring back a regular feature article that Uncle Bruce started years ago!

By Ed Riel



This article is addressed to the newest generation in the Riel clan. It is a plan to learn more about you.

Who are the Great Grandkids of Frank Riel & Edith Merica Riel? Currently, there are 30 of them ranging in age from 24 years to less than one year.

From the perspective of one of these great-grandchildren, their family includes their brothers and sisters (if they have any), and two parents which gives them two sets of grandparents. One of these grandparents is one of the eight children of Frank and Edith. So far not too difficult to think about family. However, the parent who is a grandchild of Frank and Edith has 14 aunts and uncles and 21 cousins, that number doubles as most of them are married and these families collectively have 30 children. These are some of the people you see at the Riel Thanksgiving Celebrations and Christmas Bowl. The Riel family has more people than most of you can remember from one family gathering to the next.

From the perspective of your Great Grandparents, Frank and Edith, as each of their eight children left home to go to college, then married, and then had kids of our own, keeping track of family changes was a challenge. Frank started the newsletter to keep his own family close by sharing their news. His interest in the happiness of his own children was demonstrated by continual pleas to write articles about the greatness of their own children the next generation, which includes one of your parents. If you look back in the Riel Family Newsletter you will find a column by Great Uncle Bruce helping us to learn new things about your parents' generation.

The children of Frank and Edith, particularly Great Uncle Robert, are keeping up the tradition of a monthly family newsletter. And since all of us have become grandparents, we would like to celebrate you, the great grandkids with the same love and interest that Frank showed for our collective children.

So, young ones, like it or not, we, your Great Aunts and Uncles want to know more about you. We hope you will be willing to be interviewed by a great uncle, a great aunt, or a grandparent so we can write these stories about you. Here are some of the questions we might ask you when we chat with you.

- When other people look at you, what do you want them to see? Describe yourself as you wish to be seen. What makes you different from other kids?
- Hopefully, you have seen the Riel Family Tree. If not, Great Aunt Margaret will be happy to share it with you. Which family member on the Riel side is the closest in age to you? What do you know about them? Can you pick someone from the other side of your family, and tell us what makes this person special to you?
- What is a favorite type of toys, books, songs, clothes, sports or outdoor activity, video games, color, trip, adventure, place, or hobby that you want us to know about? Why do you like it?
- From all you have seen; movies, videos, real life, and news; what do you think of the adult world?
- What question(s) would you like to ask the readers of the RFNL?
- What is the best way for your cousins to get in touch with you?

So, when you meet or talk on the phone with one of your Great people, please help us better get to know you. And we hope you will like being featured in the Riel Family Newsletter!





Visitors from Germany

By Birdy Hartman Hall

Lyle and I were lucky enough to host a stay with my German intern from 2008. Vanessa Thiel was assigned to my classroom for a couple of months so that she could fully immerse herself in American culture. It was her first trip to the states, and she spent as much time traveling on her weekends as she could fit in. But during the school day, she was very intent on learning how we engage our early learners. We became fast friends. Bruce and I hosted dinners at our home with friends Holly, Rex, Kym, Doug, Scott, Listy and Bob. She loved going to Disneyland with Scott and Sea World with me. We did all we could to make her time here special.

In 2009, Bruce and I, along with our traveling buddies, Holly, and Rex Panton, went to Germany. We did a lot of great tours while abroad, but all of us agreed that the best part of our trip was visiting Vanessa in Cologne, Germany. She gave us a tour of their famous church and the town of Cologne. Later we met her parents and sister for a lovely dinner. There was a lot of laughter and joy as we dined with these wonderful people.



In 2012, Vanessa returned to the states with her dad in tow. She wanted him to experience why she was so in love with California. He did not speak any English, but we were so thrilled to be together again. He was like a kid in a new world. Everything delighted him and we were so glad to be reunited.

2015 Bruce, Holly, Rex, and I returned to Europe and again visited with our old friends. They took us to an amazing restaurant right on the river. Even with a language barrier we managed to laugh and enjoy the afternoon so wonderfully.

Vanessa remained my friend. We would correspond on and off as the years went by. Holiday wishes and birthdays were never forgotten. I called Vanessa my German daughter. She sadly reached out to me when Bruce passed and shared my sorrow. So, in good times and bad we have been friends.



Which brings us to her latest visit to the states. This time, she did not bring her mom or dad. We were thrilled to see her in a happy relationship with a splendid man named Sven. He was full of life and shared the love of California with Vanessa. They spent five days with us in our home, and we were so sad to see them leave. We taught them to love Pickleball, took them golfing at the Heights, and introduced them to some fun wines. I got them tickets to the San Diego Zoo and Sea World. Sven had never seen any marine animals and so he was thrilled. Our favorite part of their visit was when we would have dinner with them, and when we got to hear them recap their amazing day. There is something truly affectionate as you hear about your city explained by people that are visiting. It makes you realize what a gem of a city we live in.

It was touching to see how quickly we, as strangers, bonded. Having Sven and Vanessa here was like hosting two old friends that we have known forever. We sure look forward to future visits and hope that it isn't too long before we get to enjoy each other's company again.





Traveling with the Grands

By Listy Gillingham

A new adventure for us was to take the grandkids out of the city without their parents while they were traveling in Ireland. We decided that if we were going to spend 9 days together, it would be a lot more fun for everyone if we went on a vacation, so we booked a week at the Marriott Villas in Palm Springs. It turned out to be a great idea because everyone went into vacation mode from the moment we arrived. Each boy (we took the three Keith brothers) got to lay claim to their bed and set up camp.



Lucky for us, the resort is set up for kids with plenty to do both in the heat and out of the heat. We started every morning grabbing the best lounge chairs under the misters by the Kid's Activity Center. This made it easy for the boys to take charge of their day. We had the slide and water park area by us as well as a giant pool, that was perfect for cooling off and throwing a football. The activity center was equipped with special activities and video games which seemed to catch their attention when they needed to chill off. Bob and I sat and read, while we “watched” the kids (gratefully they are pretty great about watching each other and being good).

At 2:00 each day the Marriott would offer snow cones and root beer floats by the pool side which seemed to always be a big hit. After the sun hits its peak (around 3:00), we'd head back and have some more down time relaxing. I planned for a mini golf tournament that we set up inside the condo which was a big hit as well. We also played a few games, and we did our share of cooking and going out.

We did take them up to the top of the tram for a hike on one of the days to escape the heat and get some exercise. They have a cool restaurant at the top where we were able to eat after our long hike of about 2 miles! It was fun to share the Idyllwild Mountains and experience the views of the desert below. Overall, it was a great vacation and fun to be with our boys!



FAMILY

SHORTS



On Saturday, August 13 Chris and Nathen Riel turned 41. Jan and I, instead of the traditional family B Day dinner had a Sunday morning brunch at the Bally Hai Restaurant on Shelter Island. Their world-renowned Mai Tais, unparalleled view of the bay, and an unbeatable buffet made for an awesome celebration.



But wait! Where is Chris and Jessica; Chris got COVID on his birthday and the best we can do is send him a quarantine in place, pot pie dinner; RATS !!

But we had another b-day dinner last week. It was at Jimmies Restaurant, (self-proclaimed world-famous hamburger). The family was again there (except for Timmy and Federico in SF) (you guys are missed). And the dinner was just as much fun, (even without the Mai Tais) and made all the more enjoyable by the shenanigans of Blake, Quinn, and Coral.