



Meeker Family

2004



Christmas Newsletter



Happy Holidays from the Meekers, Christmas 2004

Happy holidays, everyone! It has certainly been a very exciting and life altering year for us. Thank you for allowing us to share it with you.

Last December, we had a very exciting Christmas. We were expecting our second little one and Piper was very excited about being a big sister. Every time we went into a store, she was picking out something for her new baby sister. For the first time, Piper was big enough to help decorate the "grandchild tree" at my parents' home - this was the tree Lee and I had given them to announce that Piper was coming. She helped put the lights on the little tree and had a great time. She also participated in her preschool Christmas program, staying up in front of all the parents with her class to sing some beautiful songs. We spent some time before Christmas at my cousin Anna's home, Christmas day at my parents' home, and the weekend after Christmas at Lee's parents' home. The holidays are always busy, fun, and full of family.

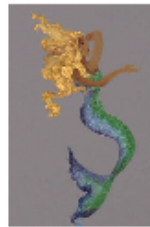


January brought with it many challenges and excitement. We saw Amber for the second time (this time much larger) and knew we were having another little girl. Piper, as always, was happy and looking forward to helping prepare Amber's room. I told her she must wait until winter term at Furman was complete, as I knew I'd have little time to work on the room until my maternity leave. I started winter term and kept very busy with twice as many classes as I had taught before. January and February were a whirlwind of activity for all of us.

February was cold, stressful, and exhausting. My animation class was moved to the winter, since I wouldn't be there in the spring, and they had new (Great!) software - Maya - the software of the professionals. I was proud of my students, who in less than 6 weeks, learned the software and the material of the class to produce great short computer animated films. When February ended, so did my time at Furman, as I was to begin my maternity leave. It was a welcome relief as the stress of the term, the additional workload, the commute, and the pregnancy were weighing on me.



With two and a half months remaining (or so I thought), Lee, Piper, and I began to transform the former guest room into a nursery/baby room. As I had stenciled Piper's room for her, I wanted to do the same for Amber. The theme was "ocean," and included a beach wall (complete with sand "piper's" and a sheltie in the sand - a nod of recognition to the big sister and furry big brother), and three ocean walls. Lee painted the walls in three colors - light blue sky, dark blue ocean, and sandy mud color. The "beach" wall was painted with a sky, and white sand color. Then, Piper and I took over. Piper really enjoyed helping me. She picked out some of the contents of the room and she helped me stencil. She did the sandpipers, faces on the clouds, mermaid, turtle, and several fish (including 'Nemo')! Stenciling is a wonderful art for a preschooler - if you can teach them to only paint on the walls when you say it's ok! We finished the room at the end of March / first of April. Then, Piper helped her daddy put together the crib - her old one. She generously gave it to her soon to arrive baby sister since Santa had given her a "big girl bed" for Christmas.



March also gave us some time for Candy, of Candy Ward Photography, to take some pictures for us. She does such a great job. She took some wonderful photographs of Piper and me. It was nice to have some pictures of "mother and daughter" before the next little one arrived.



I also traveled back to Greenville for Mitchell's Photography to take some Easter shots. Their live bunny was a hit with Piper - she won't get near someone dressed up, but give her the real thing and she's begging to hold and love the bunny. She gave the bunny a sweet hug and then asked for one for a pet for a long time afterwards!



Also in March, Lee and I made an important decision. It was time to sign my contract for the next year at Furman, and I had to decide if I could keep up the schedule and the commute with two small children. We had been praying about it for a very long time and every sign seemed to tell us that it was time to stop the commute. So, I have decided to stay home with my girls for awhile and then see what the Lord has in store for me elsewhere. It is with a heavy heart I say goodbye to Furman as a place of work, but it will always be my alma mater and I look forward to many visits there in the future.



Piper, over the past school year, has made many friends, one of which is Elaina. Elaina was able to come over and play with Piper and the two of them had such a fun time together. They love to dress up, play with makeup (watch out there!), and run through the house. The only sad time is when we must say good-bye, but these two are wonderful friends.

The first Sunday in April, our Sunday school class gave us a fun diaper shower. We do this for each of our members who are expecting a baby - everyone brings diapers, as we know they will certainly be used! We also received some fun little bath things, cute clothes, and had a wonderful time. Piper enjoyed helping open the presents and even had a couple for herself.



April also brought with it Easter - and Easter egg hunts! Piper had a fun one at her preschool and then several others at home and at her "Nana and Granddaddy's"!



Knowing the summer would be adventurous, with two little ones, Lee and I had decided to purchase an outdoor swing set for Piper (and later for Amber). The one we "inherited" from the previous home owners was full of splinters and very worrisome. So, we purchased one from "Childlife" and we LOVE it. They are guaranteed not to splinter and you can add on to it as the child grows. We now have a swing set for 4, monkey bars, a picnic table, parent swing, slide, and tree house for our little ones. It's also moveable, so if we move to a new home, we will be taking it with us. We ordered it and it was due to arrive April 17th, three weeks before Amber was due on May 5th. This, we thought, would give Piper some time to get used to it and enjoy playing with it... little did we know!



As you know - little miss Amber Cherry Meeker decided to arrive 3 weeks early and joined us on April 16th, 2004. She was adorable and perfect with 10 little fingers and 10 little toes! She was 7 pounds, 3 ounces and 19.5 inches long. Piper was so excited when we woke her at 1 in the morning to tell her that her sister was on the way. Though my parents met us at the hospital and tried to take her home with them, this little determined three year old would not leave until she saw her baby sister. She was thrilled to hold her (with assistance) and was so excited to become a big sister. She had a present for Amber - a beautiful little outfit she picked out. Amber also had a present for her - a jewelry box. Piper loved it. With some persuasion, she left with Nana and Granddaddy and Lee and I tried to get some rest. However, poor Lee had to come back to the house the next day to let in the Childlife people. Our neighbor, Don Humphries, was happy to help by pointing out where to place it and watching the construction so that Lee could return to the hospital.



Amber was welcomed into the world by her parents, big sister, Nana and Granddaddy, Grandm and Grandpa, Aunt Nell, and godmother Kim at the hospital. Her "furry big brother" Morgan was thrilled to see her when she came home.





When we arrived home, Morgan was thrilled! He looked at Amber with unmistakable love in his eyes. He was just as excited as the rest of us. With friends and family visiting us, we had a busy April and May. However, Piper did take time out to paint her "Kim's" toenails!



The preschool also had a beautiful Mother's day celebration. May wrapped up the Riverbanks zoo classes, after which Piper rode her first pony (pony rides are now offered at Riverbanks zoo). There was also her final gymnastics class for the year and the preschool graduation from the 3 year class to the 4's. We closed out May with a Memorial day/Lee's birthday celebration. Some friends came over to help us celebrate - Todd and Carrie, who were due to have their own little one any time. June came in quietly, and Piper was old enough to enjoy vacation Bible school at St. Andrews. It was her first year and she had a wonderful time.





At the ripe old age of 2 and $\frac{1}{2}$ months, Amber took her first beach trip. As usual, we traveled down to North Myrtle Beach the first week of July. We were joined by Mama and Daddy and Aunt Nell and Kim. We used the same photographer, Angela Felenz Photography, to take some pictures of our little ones. We got some good ones of the girls and of Morgan. We also enjoyed the 4th of July by viewing the fireworks from our rented beach house - "Mart in Manor," and eating yum my cake! We ate several times at the "Sea Captains" (best seafood ANYWHERE!) and Piper begged to have her picture taken at the "Shark store." We had a very fun time. Lee and I also took in a show - "Medieval Times." It was really amazing what the horses can do, and the food was not bad. On the beach, Piper tried her hand at kite flying and catching fish with a net. (She was more successful with the kite than the fish!) Amber felt like the beach was a nice place to sleep, as long as it didn't get too hot. She stayed under the umbrella, being passed from her Nana to her Kim to her Aunt Nell, then back to Mama for a nice bath at the cottage. The beach is such a relaxing place.





When we returned from the beach, it was time for Candy (of Candy Ward Photography) to take Amber's 3 month pictures. Amber was a wonderful little baby and we got some great shots. While at the beach, we had found (in two different children's shops) matching mother daughter outfits for all three of us. So, we were all in a cool blue outfit for the day.

Sadly, in July, we suffered a loss. My grandmother, Oleta Huggins passed away after a long battle with illness. In life, she loved flowers and people. She gave a lot to the Lugoff and Camden community - she helped teach children to read, she created beautiful afghans, she did pine needle art, and she gave of herself to the area. As a child, she took me aside to teach me the pine needle art and I have some of her pieces and two afghans. We will miss her.



Three weeks later, my family suffered a second loss. My Uncle Sam (Grandmama's brother) passed away suddenly after a heart attack. As a child, I remember going to he and Aunt Lois' house and climbing trees, petting cats, and going to his auto parts store. He loved family and friends and was an avid NASCAR fan and racing sponser His passing was a shock to our family and we will miss him.



July also brought with it a week long gymnastics camp for Piper. She loves her "Miss Kim's Gym" and participated in a camp at Crooked Creek park in Chapin. Each "team" of age groups chose a country and they had a mini-Olympics. Piper was on the American team and wore red, white, and blue.



At the end of July, Lee, Amber, and I went up to Furman to clean out my office. It was Amber's first trip to Furman, so we had to get some pictures of her in the beautiful flowers and one of Riley Hall.



We closed out the month with a trip to the beach with Aunt Nell and Kim. Piper played her first game of putt-putt and really enjoyed it. Amber just likes "cooling it" on the beach, with the nice breezes.



August was a nice fun month filled with family home moments. We did take a day trip to the beach to meet one of my quilling friends - Ev Rooney. She had come there with family and we wanted to get together. Otherwise, we spent the time at home, letting Morgan watch over his new charge. We also visited with Lee's parents during the month. We closed out the month introducing Amber to her first taste of rice cereal. She was not a fan. She liked it much better when we mashed up a bit of banana in it. She has very discriminating taste!



September brought with it some exciting times. Piper, back at preschool, had an accident which gave her her first black eye. We also attempted to clean out Piper's room and were able to fill a chair with all the teddy bears and bunny rabbits she has! We hid the children in the toys - can you spot them?



Candy again took some great pictures of the girls for us, along with some great ones of Lee and me with them.



Lee's aunts and grandmother were passing through SC on their way back to FL for the year and we met them in Sumter to say hello. They were so surprised at how big Amber was. Piper got to open some birthday presents early and had a great time.



Piper's preschool had a fun idea - "Pet Week." Each day, one of the children brought in his or her pet. Morgan went on Monday. After discovering he was surrounded by 4 year olds, Morgan looked at me like "And WHY am I here?" However, the next day, he was very insistent that he was supposed to go to school and very upset with me when he had to remain at home.



Piper turned 4 years old on September 23rd. She had a "princess and knight" party at preschool, with cupcakes, cookies, and party favors. Her teachers, Mrs. Kimberly and Mrs. Denese, had a wonderful board that let Piper change from "3" to "4" and she had a great time. The following Saturday, Piper and 15 of her friends (that's right, 16 children between the age of 2 and 6 in our house) had a Disney princess and knight birthday party. The children had a cardboard castle to color and each young lady was able to get her nails painted and receive a tiara. Each young gentleman was knighted and given a toy sword and shield. After coloring the castle, we gave them cake and ice cream and let them outside to eat and play. There were kids all over that Childlife swing set - just what I imagined when we purchased it. After running out some of the sugar energy, we brought the little ones back inside to have a piñata - this one was really neat. It had strings instead of a stick and one "magic string" was the key to opening it all up. Each child took a string in turn and pulled it out. We were beginning to wonder if it would work at all, after each child had about 3 turns, but then it burst open and the kids loved it. After the children left, Piper got to enjoy some special time with her Nana, Granddaddy, Great-Granddaddy, Kim, and Aunt Nell, who had been there for the party, helping watch Amber while Lee and I hosted.



Piper's Grandma and Grandpa Meeker were able to come over the next day, extending the birthday fun. Piper joyously showed them her decorations and swing set. Amber tried to swing a little, but only with her Daddy's help. Grandma seemed to like the parent swing and Morgan just liked being outside with everyone. Piper ended the day by showing off her Halloween costume - Cinderella.



The first weekend in October, Piper and Amber went to visit their godmother Kim. Kim's birthday is also at the end of September and Piper and Amber wanted to go and celebrate with her in her new house.



The next weekend, October 9th, I was asked to return to the SC State Fair to demonstrate quilting. I spent the morning showing all those interested what quilting was. It is always a fun experience. Then, we went to enjoy the fair. Piper got to ride her first rides, as last year it started raining before we could let her ride. We also got the wonderful and obligatory elephant ear, corn dog, French fries, etc. This was a treat for me, as I've been working on losing weight.



Before we knew Amber was coming (last year) I'd joined Weight Watchers and lost 11 pounds. When I found out I was expecting, I left the program after those 6 weeks but rejoined in May, a month after Amber was born. I was only two pounds up from the weight I had left it and have since lost another 30 pounds (so I count my total loss at 39 pounds!). Weight watchers is really the way to go, as they teach you how to eat in moderation, what portion sizes really are, what is good and bad for you, and don't force you to stop eating the things you love (just perhaps less of them). Kathy, our leader, has fun topics and tips each week along with "memorable quotes." For instance, "Food can go to waste or to waist." And "Frogs are nature's only creatures that get to eat what bugs them." I would encourage anyone to look into their program, as it has really helped me a lot. I'm now back to my graduate school weight and hope to be back to my college weight before I declare that I have reached my "lifetime goal" and then begin to maintain my weight at that point. One thing you learn there - one elephant ear is ok. Ten... well, moderation is the key.

So, after enjoying the Fair and the Fair food guilt free, (Lee tried the fried oreos - not recommended), we traveled to Lee county, SC for the Huggins family reunion the next day. It was my Aunt Rie and Uncle Warren's 75th wedding anniversary, so it was a very special reunion indeed. How many people do you know who make it to 75 years, let alone 75 years together? They are so very sweet and special.





After the reunion, we went back to Mama and Daddy's house where Piper and Amber loved playing with the scarecrow decoration and, of course, their Granddaddy's new convertible "bug."



Before the weather got too cold, Lee and I decided it was finally time to paint our home. Candy's husband Tony (of "Sprayaway Exterior Cleaning") pressure washed it and Gerry Burton, a neighbor who owns a general contracting business, painted it for us. He invited us to drop by his home for Halloween and see the giant decorations he and his wife had out. Piper just loved it!

We received a coupon for a new picture place opening up in the mall - the "Picture People." We used it to take the girl's pictures in their Halloween costumes. Aren't they cute?



We met up with Todd, Carrie, and David - their new addition - CONGRATULATIONS! - and some friends to go to "Boo at the Zoo."



Riverbanks zoo set up a mini wonderland for the children to go safely trick or treating. They all had a nice time and Amber was fascinated with the lights on the trees. The next day, Todd, Carrie, David, Piper, Amber, Lee, and I went to the Harmon Farm - here, we went on a hay ride through a haunted forest down to the pumpkin patch where we then found our way through a



corn maze before riding back up to the farm. Piper wasn't sure about the hay ride at first, but really enjoyed the maze. To find our way, we had to answer questions correctly whenever we hit a split in the path. If we ran out of path, we'd chosen the wrong answer.





We also traveled back to Greenville, where Mitchell's Photography grabbed a fall picture of Piper and Amber in little monkey outfits. Aren't the sleeves cute? Amber likes to try to eat hers. She was sitting up at this point.



When Halloween came this year, it was actually on Sunday, so Piper went trick or treating on the 30th - hitting our neighborhood and then getting her Daddy to take her over to Elaina's house to see her little friend. The next night, St. Andrew's had its annual "Family Fall Festival" with a pancake supper and games for the children. Elaina and her family came and the girls had so much fun together.



As soon as Amber was sitting up good, she and Piper went to Candy's to get those 6 month pictures. She's so sweet!



Well, within about a week of the fall picture, Mitchell's photography was beginning their Santa pictures. They are the ones that put Santa behind the children first, through a window, so that the kids don't know he's there. Piper wasn't fooled this year, though - she asked Mitchell "Isn't Santa back there?" After being convinced that Santa was feeding the reindeer, Piper sat in the big leather chair with her sister. The two of them were so cute. Then, Santa came out and the girls sat on his lap, Piper telling him what she wanted for Christmas and Amber pulling his (very real) beard!



We also took the girls back to the Picture People for Christmas photos - they have such cute props. With the girl's snowman dresses, the snowflakes and snowman were perfect. Piper also had a cute gingerbread outfit that was perfect with their gingerbread prop. Finally, Amber said hello through the "Ho, Ho, Ho!"



The Friday before Thanksgiving, Santa arrived at Columbiana mall. There, we met Elaina and her family for cookies with Santa. Santa also let all the children ride the carousel for free that night, so they had a ball.



Amber LOVED Piper's balloon butterfly!

Thanksgiving Day, Mama and Daddy came and joined us for dinner. Then, after we ate, Todd, Carrie, David, and Carrie's parents came over to bring delicious desserts and help us trim the Christmas tree. Candy had agreed to come to the house and take some very special Christmas photos of us, so it all had to be ready. Candy came that Saturday and we have some adorable pictures of the girls in the living room and in their own rooms (with their own little trees). Morgan also posed very sweetly for us.



We wish you all very happy holidays. Our contact information is the same:

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Have a very Merry Christmas and please be sure to let us hear from you now and throughout the year.

Love,



*Lee, Paige,
Piper, Amber,*

*Morgan,
and*

Samuel