

Meeker Family Christmas Newsletter, 2006

Merry Christmas Everyone!

Once again, it is time for our annual Christmas newsletter. This year, I told myself I was going to cut it back a little - however, I don't think I did a very good job of it. There's just so much to tell! We hope you all have had a good and memorable year. We certainly have. Some of the highlights of 2006 include...

This year, we welcome Kate Schelling (sister to David, daughter of Todd and Carrie), Daniel Kirby (brother to Laura, son to Dessie and Perry), and Aubrey Payne (sister to Wade Albert and daughter of Anna and Wade) to our world. Babies are always so much fun!



Last December brought with it many wonderful events. Hammond had its annual holiday event, where the entire school, K-4 through Senior class, got together to sing. The youngest and oldest students paired up, as each senior walked a K-4 student through the audience and lifted them up to a huge Christmas tree to place a candy cane. This was followed by beautiful music from the students. What a fun and unique experience! Also, each year, the K-4's at Hammond have a "Gingerbread Man" performance, where their teacher reads the book "The Gingerbread Man" and the kids sing songs about his attempted escape! Piper's class topped it off with a Christmas Party, decorating graham cracker gingerbread houses of their own.



St. Andrew's Baptist also had a nice presentation for the children's choir. Piper does love to sing! The preschool also put together a program where each class had a little performance. Amber's (the 1's) were to sing "Jingle Bells." One of the parents asked us all to bring little pillow cases and she made cute little costumes for the children, each one with a portion of the song written across them. The kids sang and shook their little bells for us all - it was so cute!



Christmas brought with it the usual flurry of activity - the girls and I decorated cakes and made rolls and desserts to prepare for the big day. Christmas morning, Piper was so excited and Amber became so when she realized that the guy in the costume (that she didn't quite trust to sit on his lap) had brought her and her sister lots of presents! Amber left the presents when she saw that Morgan had also received some gifts and she wanted to give him some of his Christmas treats, too. Santa brought Piper a beautiful doll house and Amber a wonderful rocking elephant. We also enjoyed our time with our family - heading to the Huggins' household for the day and the Meeker's a couple of days later.



January was fairly quiet - we took Amber and Piper to Candy (Candy Ward Photography) for some cute photos using the rocking elephant that Amber had received from Santa Clause. Aren't they cute?



Each year, Hammond has a winter festival for the lower school. Here, you can get popcorn and cotton candy, snowcones (if you want them in February), get your face painted, and play lots of games. It was a lot of fun!





Piper and Amber gave me the most wonderful Valentine's Day present I could have asked for - on 2/13, we went to the mall and had the Picture People take their little photos. These girls had a male photographer and they flirted shamelessly! The pictures are so cute! We celebrated a wonderful photo time by heading down to Aunt Annie's Pretzels and splitting a couple of pretzels while we awaited the picture's development and they were all WONDERFUL! Thanks girls!

Unfortunately, due to some changing circumstances, we had to make a difficult decision and move Amber from St. Andrew's Baptist preschool program. God looks out for us well, and even though it was February, there was one opening left at the Thornwell Child Development Center in Clinton. Amber now rides back and forth to PC with me and loves it at Thornwell. She's very happy there. We miss our friends at St. Andrews, but had to leave - both the preschool and the church. It was a wonderful 10 plus years there - where Lee and I met, where Piper and Amber were dedicated, and where we made many friends. We wish everyone there the best.

Thornwell Child Development Center (TCDC) is a wonderful place. Her teachers, Mrs. Cindy and Mrs. Sissy, had Amber adjusted and happy within a couple of days and she has learned so much since going there. She's very happy.



I can't believe my little girl is growing up so fast. This past February, Piper started talking about a loose tooth, and soon we were having our very first visit from the tooth fairy. How exciting!

Being members at Riverbanks Zoo is wonderful. It's a great safe place to go that the girls never tire of. We visited with Carrie and David one March day



This past Easter, for photos, Candy (Candy Ward Photography) was able to obtain a 2-week old baby lamb. This little fellow was SO CUTE! Piper and Amber were fascinated. Both wanted to hold him and feed him hay, but this little one was mainly interested in a bottle at this point! Aren't the photos just adorable?



Well, this April, our little girl turned two! It's so hard to believe - time goes by so very fast. For the longest time, we thought we'd give her a "Mary Poppins" birthday party, as she listened to that movie over and over (and over and over and...) but just before her birthday, she switched her favorite to the "Wiggles" so a Wiggles party we had. Amber had a wonderful time and her family and friends were with her to celebrate. We had a lot of fun, even though (for the second year in a row) Amber decided that she was just exhausted and took a nap to revive in the middle of her party!



Our baby is growing up. Amber was very happy to help her Daddy assemble her new big-girl bed that she received for her birthday, complete with dolphin themed coverlet (to go with her ocean themed room). She and Piper "helped" Lee assemble the bed (and it stayed together anyway). Amber has slept there ever since.





One of Piper's favorite Easter traditions is quickly also becoming one of Ambers. The girls hid Easter eggs throughout the house this year and Piper's class at Hammond also enjoyed a wonderful egg hunt at Fox Tree Farm. She got to see horses, goats, and kittens and then she and her friends searched for eggs through an area that will become this year's Christmas trees! The Easter Bunny also appeared for a performance.



Meanwhile, the TCDC had a little egg hunt and Amber was really into it.

Unlike some of the other children, she went straight for the eggs. Many just happy to be outside, so Amber had little competition. She filled her several times and was happy to bring home a small basket filled with Amber poses here with her class and Mrs. Sissy, one of her teachers.



of them seemed little basket up goodies to keep!



Easter was extra special this year because Amber's birthday and Easter were the same day. We celebrated Amber's birthday a week before, as Easter is a very important day all on its own. The girls were surprised by

the Easter Bunny's visit and we also visited with Nana and Granddaddy and Grandma and Grandpa. Egg hunts all around!



We had a nice surprise in April - Piper's friend Elaina came for a visit from Ohio. Piper was so excited about her coming - her K-4 class heard all about Elaina and her teachers even told me how excited Piper was. The girls had a wonderful time together and were very sad to part. However, this seemed to cement in their minds that "good-bye" doesn't mean forever. These two have been best friends since the age of 3. Later this year, we found out that the Angle's were moving closer to us - into the Atlanta area. Piper and Elaina are happy to only be 3 hours apart instead of 8!



Piper culminated her USC ballet and tap class experience by participating in a ballet at the Koger Center. She was a little white rabbit in the ballet "Alice and Wonderland" and all the children were just so cute! After the performance, Piper received a beautiful bouquet of flowers from her Daddy and then we all went for dessert with Nana, Granddaddy, Mr. Todd and Mrs. Carrie. Amber and David shared a baby sitter and we all had a wonderful time (even though Piper fell asleep before the end of her cheesecake!).



Well, toward the end of the school year, I began talking to the Dean about staying at PC. I have renewed my contract in a tenure track position and am really enjoying my time there. Go Bluehose!



Come May, I realized that we didn't have very many photos of Amber's class and teachers at TCDC - well, we had to correct that, didn't we? So, I took some photos when the kids were outside playing, as well as inside getting ready. They are all so cute at this age! We also got a picture with Mrs. Cindy - her other main teacher. They have two main teachers and some others that "fill in" as well as a "grandma" for each classroom. It's a wonderful environment for the children!



As the end of the school year approached, Hammond had some exciting events planned for the lower school. The first was "Fun Day." This is an annual tradition where the Kindergarteners - 4th graders gather into teams (of mixed grades) and become a country (like France or Japan). They then compete in hula-hoop competitions, potatoe sack races, egg on a spoon races, etc. The K4's gather into 4 teams of their own for some fun with the group. Beginning with a parade before the parents and ending with a dance to the 4th grader's favorite song (as they are about to graduate from the lower school), it was a very exciting day. The final tradition included a picnic where each child got a shirt which every other child signed with a permanent marker. I was very surprised how many older children knew Piper - my little socialite, I suppose. Amber attended with me, sporting her Hammond cheerleading outfit and all of Piper's friends took turns playing with her (until Elizabeth's daddy started spinning them around, that is!).



Then, there was an end of the year party. This was especially bitter sweet for Piper's class, as Mrs. Jones' husband received a transfer and she would not be returning the next year. The kids had blow-up bouncers and games to play, snow cones to eat and Mr. Mancke to show them all the wonders of the outdoor world.



The last day of school was filled with fun, laughter, and tears as some children would be staying at camp over the summer and others would not. What a fun and exciting year.



While working in the office, Amber came in with a large mark across her forehead. Somehow, she'd gotten ahold of a permanent marker! I said "Amber, that won't come off!" She replied with a "Oh, no! I soooooorry." (*Sigh*) Meanwhile, Piper decided she liked curly hair and when she got her hair cut, asked Mrs. Sue to make it look like Nana's - and so she did.



We returned to Sumter during the Iris festival this year to enjoy the beautiful gardens at Swan lake. "Grandma" Meeker, joined us and we had a great time. The girls loved touching the moss that grows from the trees. Amber spied every turtle (her favorite animal right now) and Piper wanted to pet the beautiful swans but was told this was not a good idea.



In June, we went down to Myrtle Beach for a weekend with our friends Todd, Carrie, and David. The kids were delighted to find that the hotel had a pool and while there, we took them into Ripley's Aquarium. Lee and I hadn't been since Piper was about 1, so it was really neat to go back. David wasn't too sure about the fish swimming over his head in the tunnel, but Amber was so fascinated by the moving sidewalk she was on that I don't know if she really took much notice of the sharks above her. The girls got to touch a horseshoe crab, meet "Marvin the Martian" (there was a special space exhibit there) and enjoyed watching the tropical fish be fed by the diver. We also went shopping at Barefoot Landing - always a favorite spot!



We began visiting other churches after leaving St. Andrews in February and Candy Ward asked us to visit with her at Riverland Hills Baptist. We really like it there and have joined the church. Piper was a little sad to leave her friends, but made many new ones in Vacation Bible School this summer. I tell you, the decorating committee here went all out - the theme was "Arctic Edge" and they had moose, polar bears, penguins, and igloos all over. The kids really loved it and Piper sang her little heart out at the end - the songs included "This little light of mine" sung in the dark while the kids swung flashlights at us. It was a wonderful program.



As summer was upon us, it became increasingly important to me for Piper to have swimming lessons. I felt we were living on borrowed time as often as we go to the beach; also, several of her little friends were starting to have swimming parties. So, we signed her up with "The Swim Lessons Company" here in Columbia. It was recommended to us by a friend and WOW they were great. Their philosophy is to create a lifelong love of the water, so if your child is afraid to put her head in the water (like Piper) they don't force her to. Instead, they teach her life saving skills (like floating and dog paddling) with fun games that eventually will have her face in that water. Amber also wanted to swim, and swim she did. Within 2 lessons, she was "dolphin diving" - going under the water about arms length, being released, and kicking back to the top, blowing bubbles all the way. Both girls LOVED their lessons and I highly recommend this company.



Back in April, Lee and I started looking for a car to replace the aging Malibu. We decided with all the driving we do, that a hybrid may be a good choice and began looking at the Toyota Prius. This turned out to be a difficult car to purchase, as so many people wanted them and the dealers we spoke to at first were not very interested in us, as they could sell the cars at over sticker price the second they got on the lot (or so they claimed). After two bad experiences, we found Dick Dyer Toyota, who was so very helpful and found us the very car we wanted (color and all) within about three weeks. (Believe it or not, this was not what we were expecting.) So, we now have a "seaside pearl" (aka blue) Toyota Prius which Piper has christened "Sky Dancer." It's been getting an average of 45mpg and handles very well. Amber and Piper especially like the DVD headrests which means that they can watch the same movie or different ones.



As tradition dictates, we headed down to the beach for the week of the Fourth of July. It's so much fun to go and spend time with family. Morgan loves his morning walks along the coast as the sun rises. Since he can no longer hear, the fireworks at night no longer bother him, either. However, Piper and Amber don't like them at all, so they sequestered themselves in the cottage the night of the 4th. We enjoyed the beach, several shopping days, and lots of fun places to eat. I missed our traditional "photographer" shoot, as we were expecting to take several pictures when we returned this year. So, we took some ourselves, out on the "grand strand".



Well, the day I'd been waiting for for 3 years finally arrived! You see, 3 years ago, when I was carrying Amber, I saw some samples of a photo shoot done by Mitchell's Photography. The children were in a field of black-eyed susans and it was just astonishing. I almost signed Piper up for that summer, but knowing that it would be rather expensive, I decided to wait until Amber could also participate. Here's where the wait came in... Mitchell doesn't allow them on this shoot until they are two! So, I've been anticipating this for quite awhile and I was NOT disappointed. The photos were just awesome. The girls loved the idea and they picked TONS of flowers during the shoot. (I thought we were going to have to purchase several plants, but they said it was ok.) Take a look for yourself and you can see what a wonderful idea this is. In addition to black-eyed susans, the girls were in front of some beautiful green shrubbery, ivy covered walls, in a rock garden, and surrounded by beautiful ferns. Well worth the wait, I'd say!





This was a summer for photos, as I also wanted Candy to take some photos of Amber on the rocking horse. I have a beautiful shot of Piper at this age and wanted to get one of Amber, too. It turned out very sweet.

As July came to a close, we went back to the beach with Aunt Nell and Kim. We enjoyed the sun, surf, and beach together and then had one last meal at the Sea Captains House before heading back home. Both the girls truly love the beach. We try to go as often as we can during the summer.



Well, PC and Thornwell started back before Hammond, so Piper spent a little time going back and forth to Clinton with me. We had to take a few pictures on campus, with the beautiful trees in bloom. Amber started in a new building with new teachers and took a couple of days to adjust after a summer of "do what you want" days, but she just loves her new teachers, Mrs. Julie and Mrs. Tenille! It also helped that one of her teachers in the Toddler class, Mrs. Cindy, moved to the Three class - right across the hall. This year, Amber began gymnastics, with Dance South through Thornwell and has class every Thursday. After her first lesson, she ran up to me and hugged me tight - "I love 'nastics, Mama!" she cried!



Piper soon started her first day of Kindergarten (K5)! With her late September birthday, she is one of the oldest in her class. Her teachers, Mrs. Tuller and Mrs. Ndiffier are great and they even have two pet corn snakes in the classroom! Piper is really learning a lot, reading books and learning about money, manners, calendars, numbers, and lots of other things. She also rejoins her extended teachers from last year - Mr. Mancke, Mr. Lalunmondier, Mrs. Herring, Mrs. McAllister, Mrs. Conrath, Mrs. Drafts, Mrs. Swygert, Seniora Archilla, Ms. Duffy, Mrs. Gore, Mrs. Cruca, and Ms. Shaw.



To start the year off in a fun way and help learn their colors, the TCDC had the children dress in a different color a day for a week. This was "yellow" day.

September 4th, we received (with lots of others) the terrible news about the death of one of Piper's favorite TV stars - Steve Irwin, the Crocodile Hunter. I remember when Piper was in her cast for those long 10 weeks, that "Steve" and "Blues Clues" were the only things that she would watch. I also remember about two years later, when Piper called Lee to her as she stood frozen in the yard - she'd



seen a snake and Steve had told her never to touch a snake but to call to your Dad because they couldn't hear you. He taught her just the right thing to do and his death is a tragedy. Piper has a hard time understanding why she can still see Steve on TV if he is now with God. We'll miss you, Mate, and all the good you did for the animals of this world. Our thoughts and prayers are with Steve's wife Terri and their two young children, Bindi and Bob, who are about Piper and Amber's ages.



September also brought Elaina back to town. Piper was SO EXCITED. With Elaina living a little closer than before, the girls can visit more often. To fill the time inbetween, they often call or write little notes to one another. We took a nice walk the park together and then went to Chuckie Cheese. One special thing - Elaina spent the night! This was Piper's first sleep-over. Both girls were very good. Before turning out the lights, I told them not to talk too long and they giggled at me; however, they were both asleep within a few minutes. Elaina joined us for church the next day before leaving to go home. Amber was just as excited to see "laina, Peeper's friend" and followed them wherever they went.



At the first home Hammond football game, the little skyhawks were encouraged to wear their cheerleading outfits and join the big cheerleaders for a half-time show. Piper and her friends were very excited and had so much fun! Amber, also in a uniform, will have to wait another 2 years to participate, but enjoyed playing with everyone anyway!



Piper celebrated her 6th birthday 3 times! At Hammond, she had ice cream and cookies with her class; at home, she had a family party with family and friends on Saturday and then a friend party at Funzone in Irmo on Sunday. She had such a fun time with all her friends.



Not too long after her birthday, Candy took Piper's 6 year old pictures. In some, she looks so mature - she's growing up. In others, she's definitely six!



We enjoyed several trips to Riverbanks Zoo this year - it's such a fun thing to do, and so nice to have a wonderful zoo so close to home. The girls love seeing the animals and walking around, as well as making a visit to the carousel and gift shop before leaving. (Of course.)



The girls school photos were really cute this year - especially Amber's. Holmes Photography in Clinton came into TCDC and set up a nice background to get some really good shots of the children. Lynn Holmes was also kind enough to give me license and copies of all the photos she took of the children there so that I could create a calendar collage of the children to use as a fundraiser. It was so kind of her.



We headed back to the Picture People for some fun Fall photos. The girls had fun with the moon decoration and they looked so cute in their matching outfits.



The SC State Fair returned in October, bringing with it lots of fun and excitement. The girls really enjoyed the rides this year, as well as the elephant ears and corn dogs. We joined Todd, Carrie, David, and Kate Schelling as we rode rides, played games, and toured the petting zoo. Piper and Amber even got to ride a pony AND an ELEPHANT! They each won (or is that bought) a little duck stuffed toy at one of the games and enjoyed several rides. Amber took Piper's corn dog and ate the center out of it while Piper busied herself with a candied apple. Piper then ate the outside of the corn dog, unsure of why her little sister would leave what she felt was the best part. All in all, an exhausting and fun day all around.



Another yearly tradition is to visit Harmon Farms with Todd and Carrie. This year, Kate accompanied us on the trip, as well as Elaina and her mother Kimberly, who were visiting again. (Piper was so happy.) We found a live bunny and took a hayride to the pumpkin patch and corn maze. What fun! We tasted pumpkin cookies and left with some small pumpkins, gourds and lots of photos to remember the day.



This year, Piper announced that she wanted to be a princess for Halloween. Amber decided (quite emphatically) that she wanted to be a "Moon-key." It was a little more difficult than I thought to find a monkey costume for a toddler - most are apparently made for infants, but we were successful. Both the girls participated in a parade at their respective schools on Halloween day - Hammond's annual parade and Thornwell's trick-or-treat through the high school. They both came home with WAY too much candy and then, that night, we went over to the Schelling's home where the girls trick-or-treated with Lee, Todd, and David while Carrie, Kate, and I gave out treats. It was a fun day!



Hammond's kindergarten class had a fun breakfast presentation for the dad's called "Pancakes for Pops!" Lee went to enjoy breakfast with her and they had a great performance all lined up for their Daddy's!

With the Fall, comes the wonderful and beautiful colored leaves. Piper loves this time of the year because it means we will rake the leaves into a pile and she can jump in them. Amber wasn't too sure about this at first, but she decided it was ok but not as fun as swinging on the swing set. Morgan just decided that he's happy just enjoying the outdoors with all of us.



As we got closer to Thanksgiving, our family had a second special celebration apart from the holiday - my Granddaddy Huggins' 90th birthday! We gathered at the Magnolia restaurant in Camden, which, years ago, had purchased one of Granddaddy's magnolia paintings to decorate their restaurant. All together were my parents (Boyce and Martha), my aunt and uncle (Jodie and Howard), my cousins and their families (Dessie, Perry, Laura, and Daniel - Anna, Wade, Wade Albert, and Aubrey), Granddaddy, Lee, Piper, Amber, and I - we gathered together for a nice meal, wonderful cake, presents and family time. Happy birthday, Granddaddy!



This year for Thanksgiving, we were joined by all the grandparents and Aunt Jeanette and Aunt Rachel, who were visiting from Florida. Piper and Amber were so excited to have Aunt Jeanette to play with and while Amber curled up in Nana's arms between the grandparents and snoozed after a big turkey dinner, Piper played board games until all had to go home. It was a very nice day.

Well, this was the year - the year that Amber sat on Santa's lap without Piper. We traveled to Greenville to Mitchell's photography and he took some wonderful Santa shots, as usual. When Santa appeared from behind the set, Piper ran up to him and gave him a big hug. Amber hesitated a minute, then ran over, too. Piper confided to me later that this is the real Santa - the others you see in malls and elsewhere are elves or actors, but this is the real thing. (We thought you should know!)



Candy Ward Photography also took some Christmas family photos for us this year. Morgan was his usual well behaved self. What a fun year it has been.

*Merry Christmas All
Love,
Lee, Paige, Piper, Amber, and Morgan*

