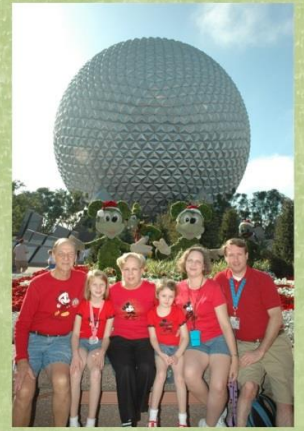


2010 Meeker Family Annual Christmas Newsletter

Merry Christmas Everyone! So much has happened - let's just jump right in, shall we?



Well, last year, my letter ended a little sooner than usual, as we were about to take a holiday trip to Disney World to see the Christmas lights with my parents. I have to tell you, it was breathtaking! There were so many things to see and do that I almost need a whole letter just for that, but I'll try to be brief. (You know me - I'm always brief!) The Magic Kingdom was magical, as always, but at night it was even more beautiful as Cinderella's castle was lit up with icicle lights from its top most towers. The parades were wonderful and the food, delicious! Animal Kingdom's decorations were awe inspiring - beautifully carved ornaments on hundreds of trees. EPCOT treated us to storytellers of how other nations celebrate the Christmas season and ended the day with a beautiful fireworks display; however, the most enjoyable part was the retelling of the Christmas story. Through narration and song, this was done in the American pavilion and was worth the trip all by itself. Our celebrity narrator was Abigail Breslin, who played Kitt Kittredge in the American Girl movie. She was very sweet! The Americas also offered beautiful a cappella singers (the "Liberty Voices") - you'll have to find their CD online! Hearing them sing is pure joy. Hollywood studios offered its own brand of beauty, with the Osbourne lights - millions of lights with lots of hidden Mickey's along the way. To be surrounded by so many lights was amazing, and the displays were beautiful. Of course, the food was wonderful, as always - we only wish we could spend more time there! One thing that happened that could only be a Disney experience was interesting... we had sat down to rest while waiting for one of the EPCOT storytellers to appear when I saw something furry in our backpack and when we looked closer, there was a squirrel in there! He was the tamest thing! He even sat on Lee's leg and looked in his pockets for granola bars! The girls were fascinated and it was difficult keeping them from petting the squirrel; we did feed him bits of cookie and granola bars and found he was a little picky - he liked gingerbread cookies better than sugar anyway. Only at Disney! This was my parents first trip to Disney and we celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary while there - there was one restaurant that had them stand up, announce their celebration, and kiss in front of everyone for 40 seconds! Disney is so much fun! The last night of our trip, their friends, Jerry and Kathy Begley, drove up from their home and spent the evening. Jerry was Daddy's best man, those 40 years ago!



When we returned from Disney, we arrived just in time for Piper and my dad, Boyce, to sing in the Christmas cantata at First Baptist Church in Camden. That also was a wonderful treat - they did such a great job. Piper loved that she was singing with her Granddaddy! Christmas brought its usual excitement and fun celebrations with family and friends. Santa was good to everyone this year!



We started January with lots of dance practices - Piper's group was to perform at local high school and college basketball half-times and she worked so hard. The halftime shows were about 20 minutes long and the performance was seamless - one age group of dancers moving behind and through another - there were no breaks at all! They did a really great job, but were preparing to do more - Southern Strutt was invited to perform during Walt Disney World's Magic Music days, and we knew another trip in April was coming - just before Amber's birthday. It was amazing the fun things we got to do this year!

January also brought Hammond's annual "Pancakes for Pops" from the Kindergarteners. Amber was so excited to have her Daddy come and hear her and her friends sing and then share pancakes with them. They did a wonderful job as well. We had a new video camera, so this time I got to see it (via film). These little ones worked SO HARD and did a wonderful job. Our baby is growing up!



Speaking of growing up - after her fifth birthday, Amber told me she couldn't WAIT to turn six - when asked why, she said "Why, because when you're six, you get a puppy." WHOA! We asked her why she thought this, and she explained that Tango joined our family when Piper was six. About once a month, she reminded us of this, even though we kept telling her a puppy wasn't really in our future. Her hopes remained high. Each year, in February, Hammond has an auction to raise money for the school - and a breeder donates a puppy. We attended this year and had a great time. After the auction, Amber asked us if we got the puppy. When we told her we didn't, she deflated - went and curled up in a little ball; it was the most pitiful thing I've ever seen. So, we (secretly) started looking for a puppy. (She wore us down!) We found a breeder of Bichon Frises in Spartanburg who was expecting a litter and talked to her about a puppy. More to come on that front...



One of the auction's highlights for me is the lower school art projects. They do such a wonderful job on these and they are so special. However, I'm ALWAYS outbid! This year, the 3rd graders made Palmetto trees from their handprints. The kindergartners created a swing, covered with their thumb prints and decorated with their class (So, Amber's thumbprint was made into a bear cub!) They also decorated a frame with their thumbs that said what they wanted to be when they grew up - Amber's confused me - she was holding money. Her teacher filled me in - when she grows up, she wants to give money to people who need it. How sweet!



This year, having Disney's annual pass, we decided to head south over the girls' winter break. It's nice to have a long weekend away and I wasn't teaching on Fridays; it was also Valentine's weekend - wouldn't you know that would be the time it would snow about a foot here in SC? So, Disney was rainy and the snow was almost gone when we returned; however, there was still enough to play with, we had fun on all the rides at Disney, and Tango really LOVED the snow - he has the perfect fur coat for it!



February also included a special day at Hammond - the annual country of study day. This year's country was Turkey, and the girls really enjoyed learning all about the food, crafts, music, dance, and many other things about Turkey. What a wonderful way to learn!



March was occupations month for Hammond kindergarten - and this time, I got to go, too! I had just fewer than 80 five and six year olds listen as I explained what a computer scientist does. They were really excited to look inside a computer (their parents don't usually let them do that - let alone TOUCH the parts inside) and then they were fascinated with the little robot I brought

that could dance and take their picture. I was asked to come back another day the next week (PC's spring break) and they actually wrote a little dance for the robot and watched it draw lines. It was so fun and they were so open with their questions - my favorite being "If the computer is open and you can see the parts inside, what happens if your dog comes into the room and drops a bone inside?" GOOD QUESTION!!

March 16th, I got a phone call from the breeder in Spartanburg - a litter of puppies had come into the world. Their mom, "Sweet Pea" (what I call Amber when she's good) was doing well. We went up to look and "reserved" a puppy. Amber was SOOO excited. She wanted to name him "Snowball," so Snowball it was to be.

As usual, Mitchell's Photography in Greenville, SC did great Easter work! The girls look forward to seeing the bunny every year!




Hammond's Grandparents day came at the end of March this year. The girls loved showing their school to their Nana and Granddaddy!



We celebrated Easter with family and friends coming over to the house. Piper, Amber, David and Kate (Schelling) hunted eggs in the backyard and we enjoyed a nice day. Then, we started to pack - Southern Strutt was dancing at Downtown Disney the following Saturday! It was so exciting! Lee's mom rode down with us a couple of days early. We used one of those days to celebrate Amber's upcoming birthday - she got a special surprise, too - a one-on-one session with Cinderella herself! Her eyes were as big as saucers when cast members called out "Is there a princess Amber, celebrating her birthday here?" The best thing - it was a total surprise for all of us! They must have seen her birthday button and invited her back. We also got to spend a day visiting Lee's aunts Jeanette and Rachel. It was nice to see their home and some of the places they've told us about. My parents, joined us on Saturday for Piper's big night - it was amazing. They had the last time slot of the night and it seemed as though everyone in Downtown Disney stopped to watch them. The show was seamless - 25 minutes of dance after dance, with dancers between the ages of about 5 to 17. All the kids came on stage at the end for a finale and they got the loudest cheers I heard of all the groups presenting. A dream comes true!



5:45 pm
Long Reach High School "Dance Company & Musical Theatre"
Columbia, Maryland
6:45 pm
Dance Academy of Boca Raton "Academy Ballet Company"
Boca Raton, Florida
7:45 pm
Southern Strutt Dancers
Lenoir, North Carolina
8:45 pm




When we returned, Amber and I got another taste of Disney as we had tickets for Disney on Ice. Meanwhile, Piper had her first dance competition at the same time, so Lee had to take her to Spartanburg AND do makeup and hair (he was less than thrilled!) Amber and I enjoyed the ice performance and Piper's group came in 3rd of over 100 groups in the competition! They had another competition the next weekend and their group came in first. WOW!



The next weekend also brought Amber's actual birthday party, hosted by her parents with guest celebrity "Sarah Dippity." She is a fairy godmother who does wonderful magic tricks and drawings for the kids. All the guests came dressed up - we had fairies, princesses, astronauts, and pirates. Sarah Dippity kept the kids and the parents in stitches with her wonderful comedy magic show and we had a wonderful time! So, little Amber got to celebrate turning six three weekends in a row - PLUS a special birthday snack at school. She was so excited! Now, she's counting down to number 7.





The final celebration for Amber came in the next couple of weeks - when we received word that Snowball was able to come home! He was very nervous but soon became a well loved member of the family. Tango wasn't too thrilled at first, but now loves the little fur ball, too! (At least, most of the time.) We visited in April and he came home two weeks later.



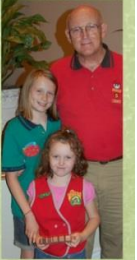
Also in April, the third graders at Hammond entranced all their parents with a play about SC - we learned/remembered so many things about our state's history. This was our first time in Hammond's theatre - the stage was GREAT! Piper played the state stone - she was a real "rock star" - the blue granite!



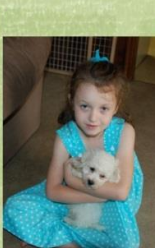
May brought more excitement. The girls LOVE to go horseback riding and we were able to sneak in the first lesson of the summer - Amber riding Alex and Piper riding Penny. They just love riding!

That evening, the girls went to their Awana's end of the year ceremony and Mr. Leroy (Amber's teacher and Piper's old teacher), stopped for a special photo.

Amber also met a milestone - her first lost tooth! She was SOOO excited! It was even better that within a couple of days, a second tooth followed. This was a really big deal for her and she couldn't wait to tell and show everyone! (Picture below!)



Before school was out, Hammond had lots of fun May activities. The Kindergarteners and 3rd graders had fun field trips to Sumter (Swan Lake) and Charleston. We also had the "Butterfly Brunch" for the moms to enjoy a wonderful kindergarten show. They sang cute little songs and had little hand movements to go with them. These kids worked so hard - they also dressed up as little bugs and were JUST ADORABLE! Thanks to all the Hammond teachers for working so diligently with these kids. You do an awesome job!



May also brought Hammond's annual "Fun Day" - a field day where teams are made up of kindergarten through fourth graders (the K-4's compete against each other). One nice feature is that the school puts siblings on the same team, once their in K-5. So, Amber and Piper worked together with their team to try to win the games. The rainbow of shirts was wonderful and after the games, we signed shirts with sharpies and enjoyed time with friends before heading home.



As I mentioned earlier, May's excitement included our new family member, Snowball, coming home. He is so cute! He chewed on everything (but is getting much better) and was so tiny! Amber and Piper just love picking him up. Each morning, Tango and Snowball wake up the girls before school - a wet nose behind the ear is very effective! Tango wasn't too sure about this little furball at first, but is the most patient "big brother" we could hope to have. We just love the little fellow.



Southern Strutt completed their year with a wonderful (almost 4 hour) concert. Though it sounds long, it was a real treat and Lee, Amber, and I went both nights (there were performances on Friday and Saturday). It was the most professional show for a dance recital I've ever seen - they performed at the Koger Center in Columbia and with only one 20 minute intermission, I was amazed that not only was our attention held, but so was Amber's. We've really enjoyed being a part of this studio - they've provided a lot of opportunity and Piper has grown so much in her ability, skill, and confidence.

With May usually comes the end of all the school year activities. At church, May brought the graduation of the kids from Awana's - a wonderful program - as well as a wonderful concert from the children's choirs at Riverland Hills. We were so proud of both girls - Amber memorized lots of Bible verses this year and Piper had memorized so many hymns in choir that she was given her own hymnal as a gift. GA's and Mission Friends also said goodbye for the summer with a cute program for the parents. Our church has so many wonderful opportunities for the children. Finally, the end of May brought the end of school - Piper and Amber are now officially heading to first and fourth grades. Wow - how time flies.

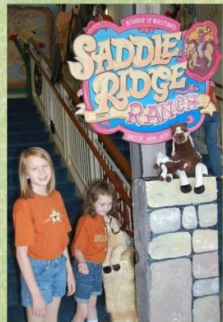


Just before the girls graduated from Hammond, I had an adventure of my own. I taught a Maymester class with one of our Physics professors - James Wanliss. He and I worked through the Spring semester with a group of students, teaching them about the computer science and physics behind theme park attractions and the space program. We took the group down to Cocoa Beach and Orlando in May, for a behind the scenes look at Kennedy Space Center and Disney World. We left 5/25 and got back 6/4 - and had a wonderful time and exciting learning experience. Travel classes are a wonderful way to learn. Along the way, the kids met a retired engineer from Kennedy (family friend Jerry Begley) for an evening of memories, photos, and stories about what he did on Apollo 8, 9,



10, 11, and 12! Jerry and his wife Kathy were nice enough to drive a couple of hours to meet with the group at Cocoa Beach, where we had a fun picnic supper on the beach together while Jerry told us all about what he did during those exciting times. The next day, we toured Kennedy, met astronaut Fred Gregory, and then left for Orlando, where we spent the remainder of the time. At Disney World, the group split and so met two different Imagineers. A Disney Imagineer is Walt Disney's term for an imaginative engineer. We each had a three hour session over lunch - what a wonderful time! We also had a 7 hour walking tour behind the scenes of the parks. The students had labs to complete and presented their projects on the last day before departure. All in all, we had a great learning experience and hope to repeat it in the future.

About a week after we returned from the Maymester, we noticed that Snowball wasn't feeling well. Unfortunately, he was diagnosed with Parvo. This is a very dangerous disease for dogs - primarily found in puppies younger than 20 weeks (our category), dogs without their shots, or older dogs with weak immune systems. Snowball was just 2 days from his fourth and last vaccination for this virus when he contracted it. We don't know how (we have a fenced yard and all the dogs around us are well kept), but he was a very sick little puppy. We were so afraid we might lose him, but our wonderful vets at the Lexington Emergency Animal Hospital and Sunset Animal Clinic worked with him and after 6 days in the clinic on IV fluids, he was able to come home. He was pampered a lot and spoiled even more, and has made a full recovery. (Though we wish we'd bought that pet insurance before this happened.) He was so very ill. Tango missed the little fellow while he was away and the girls were very frightened - Amber asked if he would go to be with God - it just tore at my heart - but we are thankful that our good Lord looks after even the smallest puppy. He went from 5.7 pounds down to 4.4, but now is back up to a good weight (almost TOO good - over 14 pounds at our last visit). June started out scary and also ended sadly for us, but included a couple of high points, too - isn't that life?



June brought Vacation Bible school to Riverland Hills and we had a "rodeo roundup" at the Saddleridge Ranch. The church really went all out with the decorations and there were SO MANY KIDS! The entire front of the sanctuary was filled with only the 3 to 5 year olds. After their 30 minute presentation for the parents, even MORE kids came in - the 1st graders through 5th graders. I don't know how the church fit them all. There were literally HUNDREDS of kids, from ages 3 through 5th grade. It does the heart good to see so many happy children loving the Lord. They ended the week with a show for the parents and sang wonderful, fun songs. They did a wonderful job and I thank everyone who helped put it together.



June also sent the girls to musical theater camp at Southern Strutt. Amber and Piper LOVED it, as this camp combined acting, dancing, and gymnastics. I thought this would win Amber over to take dance in the fall, but she chose her love - horseback riding. The week long class ended with a show for the parents and a certificate for the participants. It was a lot of fun!





June's other excitement was that Piper's good friend Elaina got to come and spend a week. Piper and Amber were so excited and we had a lot of fun while Elaina was here. She also got to meet one of Piper's good friends from Hammond - Ariana (and her family) - who met us at Riverbanks zoo for the day. Elaina also rides horses, so she got to attend one of the riding lessons, too. It was a real treat! Both Piper and Amber love Elaina like a sister.

We took Elaina home and got to spend a wonderful afternoon with her at her home in the mountains - it is so very beautiful and peaceful there.



Sadly, June also brought a loss to our family. My uncle, George Welsh, Jr., went to join the Lord at the end of June, just a few days shy of his 75th birthday. He was a wonderful person who loved God, his family, the outdoors, farming, and art. He drew several pictures for the girls and they sent several to him. He told me that he really hoped we'd get Amber a little fluffy puppy that she could love for her very own and was so happy when Snowball came home; he never got to meet the little fellow, however. As a child, I loved crossing the path between his home and my grandparent's home to go play with my cousins there. There was always something new to see - once, it was a pony! Though it is a comfort that he is in heaven with our Lord, his loss to us was very hard. Uncle George, we will miss you very much.



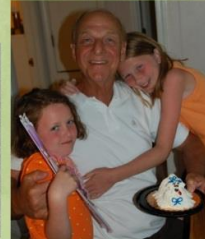
We celebrated the fourth of July with a fun cookout with family and friends. Todd, Carrie, David, and Kate Schelling joined my parents, Lee's mom, Kim, and Aunt Nell for hamburgers, hotdogs, and chicken. We ended the evening with some fireworks. This was the first year we talked Amber into enjoying them - she even held some sparklers herself! It's always fun to get together. The funniest part were the bats - they thought the sparks were lightening bugs and kept flying through our backyard, trying to catch the fireworks sparks!



July also brought some fun photos of our "boys" getting to know one another. Once Snowball recovered from the parvo episode, he was back to aggravating Tango as much as he was allowed. He loves to get Tango to chase him; Tango tries to just be the good dog and looks down at the little puppy with frustration. Snowball is not intimidated in the least! Then, they start to run and play until they get too loud and I have to call for a break. (You can see here where Snowball had his little IV around his paw.)



At the end of July, we headed down to Garden City, SC to enjoy the beach. We saw more wildlife this year than usual - dolphins, jellyfish, starfish, three different types of crab, lots of shore birds (including our favorite - sand pipers!), rays, and even a sharks fin out at the horizon. We also visited the chapel at Pawley's Island, where our cousin, Mike Alexander, was a guest minister. It is such a unique little church - seating probably a couple of hundred people. The entire back of the sanctuary is a huge window - so while the minister is preaching, you can see God's beauty in the marsh and watch the gulls fly over. We celebrated my dad's birthday the last day of the trip. We do love the beach.



As August wore on, the girls continued to ride, both of them improving with each lesson - I am so proud of them! Piper also got a fun treat - she got to see two friends that are no longer at Hammond - Gray and Sarah - for a fun spend the night party. Amber was a little jealous, but got to watch a movie in bed until she fell asleep, so it worked out. She also had a couple of playdates with her friend Alyssa James this summer.

Then, we got some horrible news - our good friend, Kim Presser, was swimming with her family off the coast of Florida and was attacked by a 4 to 5 foot shark! After 150 stitches in her arm, she was doing ok; however, she had to answer to her six year old son, who had just told her that there were sharks out there and she'd told him they only swim really far out! She and her husband Cliff stopped in SC on their way back to their home in PA, so we got to see them. We had a gift all ready - a little stuffed shark! She loved it. She's a math professor at Shippensburg and I believe she wanted to put something shark related on her desk! Thank goodness she's ok.

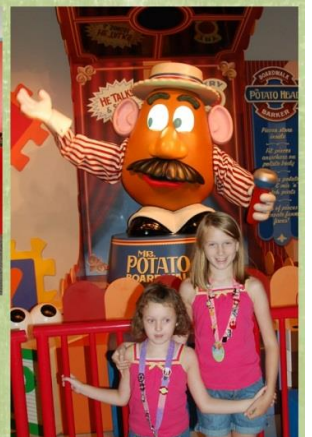
August also brought the kindergarten graduation ceremony at church. This is when Riverland Hills promotes the kindergartner's to first graders and it happens just before school begins. They get their own Bible from the church and Amber was so proud!



August 9th brought a very hard day. My grandfather, James B. Huggins, Sr., went to be with the Lord. Granddaddy was a very talented and well loved man - he could do about anything that caught his attention. He was a wonderful artist and craftsman, loved to fish, and most especially loved his church. He and my grandmother (who passed away in the summer of 2004) were members of



St. Johns Methodist in Lugoff since the 1950's and worked hard to build it up. Granddaddy could make about anything he wanted to make and could hit just about anything with a sling shot! He also enjoyed a good milk shake and onion rings when he could get the chance (as well as coffee and Mt. Dew). He loved beautiful flowers and always had some ready for the girls to pick - especially camellias and magnolias. We'd hoped for him to come visit and watch the girls go horseback riding - he really enjoyed hearing all the stories from their adventures. We'd planned it for when he felt better; however, that day did not come. We know he's smiling at us from Heaven now and in a much better place. We will miss you, Granddaddy.



The girls were very sad to lose their great-granddaddy, so Lee and I decided that the weekend before school was to begin, we would take them back to Disney. We hadn't gotten to go this summer and there was supposed to be special fireworks over the Magic Kingdom. It was a fast trip, but the fireworks were well worth the drive - of all the times I've seen them at Disney or

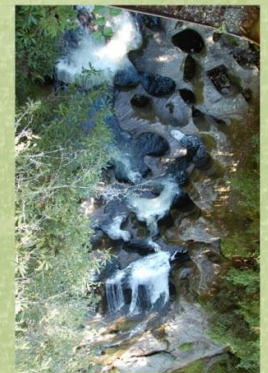
elsewhere, I've never seen them more beautiful than during the "Nightstastic" celebration. We even got a bonus - we saw the 10pm show and went back to our hotel; little did we know that there was also a midnight show scheduled and from Pop Century we could view it very well. We also did a lot of things we hadn't done before at Disney, learned to draw a couple of new characters, and met lots of the Pixar characters. Though a fast trip is tiring, it was worth it and lifted our spirits before the start of school.

One of the most anticipated days of the year in our household is the day we receive the "class list" letters, telling us what class the girls will be in, who their teachers will be, and who else will be in their class. Piper was thrilled to have Mrs. Teeter for her fourth grade year, and Amber, our great big first grader, was excited to have Mrs. Jenkins. She was also very excited that her best friend, Alyssa James, will be in Mrs. Jenkins class also. The day before the first day of school, we went in to meet the teachers and saw lots of friends and all our former teachers. What an exciting time of year! The first day of school passed with equal excitement and the girls are looking forward to a great year!





Over Labor Day weekend, we joined our friends the Schellings for a fun weekend in a cabin in NC. The cabin was in Sapphire, NC, and we enjoyed the beauty of Cashiers and the Highlands, ate Honey Crisp apples (DELICIOUS!), and were treated to gourmet meals thanks to Todd - a wonderful chef! We also enjoyed telling ghost stories by a camp fire while roasting marshmallows and making smores. There was a little creek that ran through the property and the kids enjoyed splashing in the ice cold water; they even caught craw fish and salamanders. The views are so breathtaking up there. The cabin was also fully stocked, not only with pots, pans, grill, swings, three porches (one screened), and rubber boots of every shape and size (in case you forgot yours and wanted to wade in the creek), they also had tons of games, books, movies, and three TV's (not that we needed them)! We highly recommend the Memory Mountain Lodge in Sapphire, NC. While there, we also enjoyed lunch and ice cream at "Sweet Treats" - you tell them what ingredients to put in and they make the ice cream for you! I had almond/chocolate chip; Piper went for white chocolate chip/peanut butter. After lunch, we took a tour of the mountain overlooks and waterfalls - so beautiful and peaceful.



We decided that there was not enough excitement in our lives, so the next weekend, we surprised the girls with another trip. As Disney annual passholders, we were given the opportunity to reserve seating to a passholder only showing of "Tinkerbell and the Great Fairy Rescue." For those without young ones, this movie went straight to DVD September 21st, and won't be seen in theaters. It's also the third in a series that the girls just love. Friday, we picked them up from school early, and told them that we were heading to Disney World's Hollywood Studios. Until then, they had no idea (though Amber did wonder why her lunchbox only had water and cookies in it - no sandwich!). We stopped at Chick-Fil-A on the way out and picked up lunch for the girls - a four pack and a six pack. We said "Whoever has 6, share with her sister." Piper said "I only have 4." Amber said "I only have four." I said "How many have you eaten?" Piper -"None." Amber-"Only two." *Sigh* (Piper then got her 5th nugget from her sister.)

Another surprise for the girls on this trip was the inclusion of our furry babies for the ride - Disney has opened a new pet resort - a resort for beloved pets while their families are staying on property. Since it was a short trip, we decided to try it out and Tango and Snowball seemed to have had a wonderful time - the property is "Disneyfied" with extra large decorations (fire hydrants, dog bones, cat eyes that blink, etc) and includes a nice walking path, water park, shallow swimming pool, doggie water fountain, and all the fun comforts of home. They even got doggie ice cream while they were there (dairy free, as dogs don't digest milk products well). They were happy when we visited them and did well on the car ride there and back. We checked them in Friday night and then checked into the Pop Century resort.



Saturday, morning, we went into the Magic Kingdom, where the girls enjoyed their three favorite rides and met Princess Tianna and her prince. Piper also got a surprise - "Princess Piper" was to speak to the cast member's boss - she took the phone call and received happy birthday wishes from Goofy himself! Another interesting adventure was a moving trash can - it was rolling down a hill and we followed it - it stopped and asked us to stop following it! Then, it continued to talk to our two fascinated girls as it moved through Tomorrow Land until it found a quiet corner and parked against a wall. Never moved or talked again! We headed back to the hotel after lunch to freshen up, and then headed over to Hollywood Studios where we enjoyed the movie, got to meet two stars of the film - Vidia and Tinkerbell themselves, and meet an artist/historian who has worked with



Disney for over 30 years. Disney even supplied candy and drinks to enjoy the film with and gave us a bag full of goodies to take home. It was really amazing and Disney really outdid themselves on this one. It was a quick trip, but a fun one and worth it all, seeing their eyes light up. Take the time to surprise your kids and you'll always smile at the memory!



The next week was a busy one at work - PC was able to find some money for a new computer lab and the machines arrived! So, my colleague Wayne Smith and I worked diligently to get them up and running, install all the necessary software, and get the machines in the lab - WHEW what a busy week!

Let me take a minute here for "credit where credit is due!" Many times, y'all ask me how I get all this stuff done - how do I do all the things in my letter each year AND work full time AND help the girls with their homework and activities AND plan all the stuff we do AND, and, and.... It's because I have a wonderful and devoted partner in Lee. Without him, I couldn't work an hour away with our girls in school 30 minutes on the opposite side of town. After Wayne and I got the first machine set up for the lab, Lee helped me copy its image onto the other 8 - I couldn't have done that without him (or it would have taken a much longer time). Lee is always there - helping with school lunches, laundry, doctors appointments, cleaning the house and yard, trouble shooting code, giving advice. I just wanted to take a minute and let everyone know how wonderful he is.

As you've come to know, I start out thinking small and then things just get larger! This year, Piper turned 10 - as she said, so excitedly that 9/23 morning "I'm double digits now!" Though we'd been to Disney for her birthday, we thought she'd like a few friends to come over. Piper's enjoyed performing make shift plays this year, so we found two cute ones on-line and invited some guests to come over and perform. The theme was the theatre and the kids arrived at 10am to be assigned parts, find props, make costumes, and practice. Then, around noon, we grilled hamburgers and hotdogs, after which we enjoyed the kids' performance, while videoing it. Then, we took four 2-liters of soda and tried out the famous "mentos" experiment - that soda must have gone over 20 feet in the air! Everyone went home around 7 that evening, after some cookie cake and pizza, so it was an action packed day! Piper was thrilled, as her friends Elaina and Amy were able to join us on Friday and spend the night. So, we had a silly string fight in the dark in the backyard, which was so much fun! Amy went home on Saturday, but another of Piper's friends, Avery, stayed the night and joined us for church the next day where we had our first ever fire drill at church. It was a VERY interesting weekend!



Not to forget Lee and I, that Monday, we celebrated our 13th wedding anniversary. Lee surprised me by having a bouquet of 13 roses delivered to PC during my 10:00 class. The note said he'd love me longer than the last rose would bloom - upon careful inspection, I discovered that one of the roses was artificial - its beauty will never fade. I told my students (especially the guys) that this was a great way to get brownie points with their significant other!

This last week of September was so busy - it was also Homecoming week at Hammond, which means lots of school spirit. We enjoyed PJ day, "Crayola day" (first grade was all yellow, fourth was pink, and they all ended up as a box of crayons!), Decade day (50's, 60's, 70's, or 80's - don't we feel old!), College spirit day, and HS Color day! This was also Piper's week as a car line person - she opened the doors to let out the children as the parents drove by. What a fun and busy time! The Hammond first graders also presented a wonderful production called "Fairy Tale Follies" which educated us on all the wonderful fairy tales we could remember as a child. Amber dressed as a fairy - Rosetta (one of Tinkerbell's friends). As always, it was a memorable experience!



Hammond's annual Fall Festival came October the 8th. Piper wanted to "hang out" with her friends instead of her parents - Amber wanted to know when she'd be able to do that, too! We had cotton candy, enjoyed a haunted house, face painting, "go-fish"-ing, got candy, bounced-bounced-bounced, and ended the night by winning a cake in the cake walk - the first time in six years!

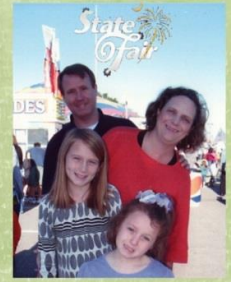


That Sunday, we went to celebrate the Huggins Family Reunion. It happens every October on the second Sunday. We enjoyed seeing everyone and celebrated Aunt Rie's 100th birthday - coming up in December of this year. It's always nice to get everyone together, but there was a hole there - it was the first time I've been there when Granddaddy wasn't. He was certainly missed.



The next week was a difficult one for Snowball - he went for his first grooming (see the before and after pictures) and then he was micro chipped and neutered. Poor little thing! Tango just contented himself to curl up with Piper on the beanbag.

We went to the SC State Fair the first weekend it was open. We enjoyed our usual elephant ear and some favorite rides. The girls also won 5 different little stuffed things (like we really needed MORE) and got to see some of their friends riding in the horse show - Mrs. Joy's daughter Cody, Elliot - who rides with Amber on Mondays, and Sara Beth, a friend of Piper's from K5 at Hammond. Piper tried a new fair food - peanut-butter dipped ice cream - a much better choice than the other new foods - fried butter or donut hamburgers!



The next day, 10/17/10, was a very special one. Amber began her public walk with Christ by being baptized at Riverland Hills. A few weeks ago, Amber heard Piper and some school friends talking about baptism and what it means and why it's important. She started asking questions and went to see Dr. Carney on 9/15. He felt she was ready and told us that when she asked again, to let her come forward - she asked again the next morning and we prayed together on our couch on 9/16/10. Beside Dr. Phillips and with two others, Amber joined her brothers and sisters in Christ in baptism. Three years ago, Piper made the same decision - now she's helped lead her sister to Christ. What an honor!



The next weekend, we went to Camden to celebrate my mother's birthday. She enjoyed seeing the girls and hearing all their stories.

Thursday, 10/28, Amber had her first fall while horseback riding. She and Alex were in the field, as rain had made the corral too muddy; I guess Alex stepped in a hole or just stumbled, but he went down on his front knees. Amber went up his neck and held on for dear life! I thought Alex was so sweet, as he put his head up to try to help her balance, but a second or two later (it felt like much longer), she rolled off onto the ground. Then, she popped up, put her hands in the air, and said "I'm alive!" (very dramatically!). She was so full of adrenaline that she didn't stop talking for the rest of the night! She's thrilled to have survived her first fall and wants me to bring the video camera in case it happens again, so that we can send it to America's Funniest Home Videos. (Oh, my goodness.)



The annual Hammond School Halloween parade was SO MUCH fun! We enjoyed all the wonderful costumes and they had a great day! Fun parade, parties for both girls, and LOTS of sugar. I picked up the girls from school and we headed over to Intel for some special trick-or-treating and a visit to the haunted computer lab, which was filled with different computer bugs! Lee and I loved it, but the girls have not programmed enough to consider it overly scary - sorry Jen! Amber WAS very interested in why some of the bugs acted the way they did - she's our little engineer in the making! That night, at home, I surprised everyone by showing them the fun little costumes I'd found for Tango and Snowball. (Lee thinks I've gone off the deep end.) Tango dressed as a squirrel - his nemesis, and Snowball was a very cute banana split. They were SO cute and didn't mind most of the costumes, but insisted that the head piece was really asking a little much of them and kept taking it off. We ended the day with our annual "gathering of leaves for the purpose of jumping into them" tradition. Last year, the girls started putting the leaves at the bottom of the slide; they continued that this year. It was a lot of fun for everyone, including Tango and Snowball!!



The first weekend in November, we took the girls for their annual photo with Santa at Mitchell's Photography (Greenville, SC). The unusual part was to take the puppies! We weren't sure if an 8 month old was ready to meet Santa, but Snowball was actually good as gold; guess he knew who he was talking to! Snowball was confused by Santa's beard (he'd never seen one before) and Tango was so sweet that Mr. Mitchell asked to take a photo of just the puppies with Santa after the girls had given their wish lists. He also took a couple of the whole family. It was nice to travel to Greenville and relax a little. If you're in the area and need photos, call Mitchells - they do an awesome job!

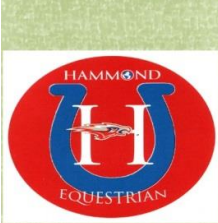
The next day, we went to the Sease Corn maze. This year, the theme was the American Soldier and we were joined by our friends Maria and Morgan Swygart. The girls had so much fun finding our path through the corn maze - I think we really only took one wrong turn! Then, they tried out the tire maze. Amber found her way to the center and Morgan decided to take a shortcut and just climbed over the wall - good thing it was secure! It was such a fun day.



The following weekend was a very busy one. For over 2 years, I've been working on a regional conference for women in computing - "CWIC - Carolinas Women in Computing." Together with Madeleine Schep and Nieves McNulty of Columbia College, we had a wonderful weekend filled with bringing female computer science students together with some of the top researchers and industry professionals. We had a great turnout - 100% attendance! Friday evening we had a fun activity with the Piper and Amber's art teacher, Jim Lalumandier, who instructed all of us how beautiful computers are inside and what art can be made from them. We also heard from representatives from Microsoft, Intel, GA Tech, Avaya Labs, Anita Borg Institute, and NCWIT. We were able to give two scholarships to two lucky students to attend the Grace Hopper conference in October, 2011 - next year in Portland Oregon. We had an amazing time and LOVED every minute of it.



November 19th marked a day that many Harry Potter fans have been waiting for for a LONG time - the first part of the final movie - "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows." Piper was SOO excited to see this movie and we really enjoyed it. We ran into Jen Wells from Intel, so we got to sit with friends as we watched Harry, Hermione, and Ron work to find a way to defeat Voldemort. Amber thought it highly unfair that she couldn't go (we thought it might be too scary). So, she talked us into watching HP5. Toward the end of the movie, she asked what the glowing balls were. We told her "prophesies" - guesses about the future. She said "Well, the futures are falling all over them." Piper loved Deathly Hallows part 1, but was sad that a friend of Harry's was killed just before the end of the movie. Even though she knew it happened in the book, Piper hoped the movie makers would take artistic license and save him. (I wish they could have - I cried, too!)



That weekend was a big one for Hammond - our football team became state champions for the fifth year in a row - no other high school in the history of the state has ever achieved this. GO SKYHAWKS! That Sunday, we traveled to the South Carolina Equestrian Park in Camden, where the Hammond Equestrian team was competing. Amber's teacher and friends are on the team (she can't wait until 6th grade, so she can join) and she and Piper joined the other girls there giving out ribbons to the winners. It was great!

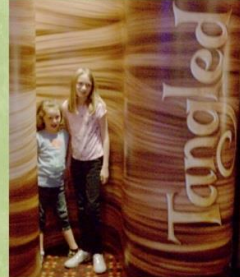
The Monday before Thanksgiving, Piper got a new look - braces! Her orthodontist says that she'll be out of them in about 2.5 years, so before our baby hits 13, her stint with braces will be done. She wasn't overly excited, but doesn't she look great? Now that the soreness is gone, she's busy figuring out what she can and can't eat.





To help Piper get her mind off of the soreness of the braces, we let her go riding with Amber the Wednesday before Thanksgiving. She was thrilled to learn that she remembered everything. Riding Jasper, she walked, jogged, and loped around the ring, even jogging through the cones. Amber kept up, jogging through the cones as well. Amber also beat Piper and Robert, the boy riding with them, in "Simon Says" on horseback! She's a good listener when she wants to be.

That afternoon, we finished cleaning the house and headed to the theater to see Disney's "Tangled." We all got wrapped up in the story - It's one of the best they've put out in awhile - you'll have to catch it if you can! Speaking of movies, our other recommended movie of the year? "Beezus and Ramona," now out on DVD. We caught that one at the beach this summer.



We had a wonderful Thanksgiving. It was a quiet one with the four of us and the "grandparents." We enjoyed turkey dinner and watched some funny videos together. As we were waving goodbye, it dawned on us that we hadn't taken a single photo. *Sigh*



This was the first Black Friday that I allowed Piper to get up early and go shopping with me. Amber overheard and wanted to go, so Lee agreed to come along to help. We hit Target, Best Buy, Bed Bath & Beyond, Justice, Belk, Gymboree, Toys R Us, and last (but not least) Chick Fil A for chicken minis. The girls had a ball shopping from 5am to about 10am. Then, when we got home, they declared they were NOT tired; however, after five minutes alone, Amber was out, with her teddies watching over her!



We hope you have a wonderful Christmas and a happy 2011. Each year brings love, joy, and change. May your 2011 be a good one.

*Merry Christmas
to all!*

*Love,
Lee, Paige,
Piper, Amber,
Tango, and Snowball!*

