

# Meeker Family Christmas Newsletter, 2011

Dear Family and Friends,

Well, another year has come and gone. I have to say, overall, though there were disappointments and sadness, 2011 was a better year than 2010 - we have so much to be thankful for. So, on to our year!

To help celebrate the Christmas season that was upon us at the end of last year, Intel hosted a fun Christmas party. It was very nice to get to go - we learned a new dance and had great fun with the photographers who were there with lots of props. The dinner was nice and we had a great time getting dressed up for the evening - we don't do "adult only" events very often.

Intel  
WINTER EVENING  
IN COLUMBIA 2010



Just before Christmas, Piper got to partake in another of Hammond's duties for the fourth grade - flag duty! She got to put up the flags in the morning and learned how to properly fold, unfold, and raise a flag. Each week of the year, three or four fourth graders took on this duty and learned everything they needed to do. Respect for country is not always taught/enforced - I'm glad Hammond takes the time.



The girls treated us to beautiful music twice in the 2010 holiday season. Nothing puts one in the mood for Christmas more than a children's Christmas program and the girls sang beautifully at church in their choirs.

Hammond also had a fun Christmas program and, since the fourth graders are the "seniors" of the lower school, they played a special part. Piper's was to comment on how long Santa's hat was, so we found her the longest Santa hat we could - it was longer than she was tall! It was fun for family to get together and enjoy their singing. The Schelling's sat with us and Kate really enjoyed herself as well - she's so cute!

After the Hammond Christmas show, my Aunt Nell went home; however, when going out in the cold to retrieve her mail, she slipped and fell from her front porch down the brick steps and broke her leg in 2 places and dislocated her ankle. She was seen by a neighbor who called for an ambulance and then faced surgery and several months of recovery at the beginning of the year. Thankfully, she is now better, though it was a really difficult time for her.



We wanted to take some fun photos this year of Tango and Snowball. For the girls' Hammond Christmas program (and throughout that last week of school before the holidays) they were allowed to wear Santa hats - we'd gone a little crazy at Party City and had 3 different ones that the girls traded back and forth. So, we decided to put them to good use - we took Tango and Snowball to the Picture People in the mall and decorated them with their own Santa hats and the ones the girls wore. Tango was very interested in being good so he could get a treat; Snowball just wanted to play with and bite off the puff balls on the Santa hats! A good time was had by all and the photographer loved getting to have fun with the pups. It was a really fun time!





After school let out for the holidays, we headed back to Disney to experience the wonder of Christmas there once again. This year, we were joined by Lee's mom and the Schellings. We headed to Mickey's Very Merry Christmas Party, but it was SO COLD. I hadn't expected FL to be cold (the previous December, it was in the 90's), so we purchased two or three sweatshirts while we were there! Some new adventures included meeting all seven dwarfs and having a photopass person take tons of photos of the girls trying to remove King Arthur's sword - then, she told us they may use them in Disney promotions - cool! We had to sign lots of forms and don't know if they will or not, but be on the lookout for Piper, Amber, and Kate on a Disney brochure somewhere! The lights at Hollywood studios were once again amazing and the Christmas parades were so much fun. The candlelight processional was, once again, an emotional experience. The funny part was that, instead of the carts selling cold drinks and fans, this time they were selling blankets! Disney is always thinking, so, of course, we had to get a blanket (it was really cold after the sun went down). If you have never been during the Christmas season, you really need to go. You'll never experience anything quite like it.



We headed home just before Christmas and enjoyed Santa and Christmas with family. We were glad that Aunt Nell was able to join us, wheelchair and all, and prayed for her speedy recovery. We enjoyed good food and time together. My mom and dad really go all out with the decorations at Christmas - their house looks like it could be in a magazine. The girls love to go and explore the decorations and expect to see a little tree in "their" room - the room they spend the night in. Under that tree is usually a small present with a little gift for each of them - a fun tradition.



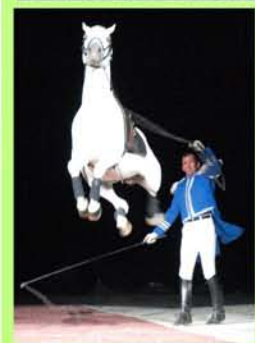
The day after Christmas was magical for South Carolinians - it snowed! Not just a few flakes floating down, but a snow. It was enough to go out and make a snow angel (barely) and a little more than we usually get. It was also much earlier - any snow in SC usually comes in February. It wasn't cold enough to stick around, though. It was Snowball's first taste of his namesake and he loved it as much as Tango, jumping through it like a little deer. We packed up and headed to Sumter to celebrate Christmas with Lee's family. We had a great time with family, opening gifts and playing games and catching up. It was so special because it was the first "nearly" white Christmas the girls or I had ever experienced!

As usual in SC, the snow melted away quickly and so the girls headed over to Joy's for some horse riding fun. Amber got to ride a different horse than usual and she proved she can handle herself; but her favorite is still Alex!





If we thought we had a treat on 12/26, we were really in for a surprise in January. For the first time since I was a child, SC received 5-8 inches of snow in various areas. Our yard had 5 to 6 inches in some parts. EVERYTHING shut down for two to three days and did we have fun! It was the first time we had enough snow to make a good sized snowman (we were so proud of him!), lots of snow angels, snow ball fights, and just general merriment! The girls and the dogs had the best time! Tango, a Sheltie, is made for snow - it just comes right off his fur and he loves the chill in the air and the excitement of the children. Snowball loves it all too, but the snow clung to his curly fur and he ended up getting a nice hot bath to melt it all out of him - towel drying and blow drying just wouldn't do it! We all enjoyed the time together, the extra hot chocolate, and the beauty of it all. It was also nice when it had to go and we all got back into the routine of life. But, for a week in January, life in SC was at a beautiful standstill. It's amazing when you get to stop, take a deep breath, and enjoy the beauty and wonder God has placed on this earth. Even getting back to the normal routine was fun, as I admired the amazingly long icicles outside my office window and the girls enjoyed the snow dancer built outside of Southern Strutt.



Before the end of January, Piper began dancing at the high school half times again. On one of these occasions, her friend Elaina got to watch - she came down for the weekend and went to one of the games and joined us to watch the AMAZING Lipizzaner stallions, which had come to Columbia. It is truly breath-taking to watch these amazing animals and riders dancing through the arena with barely a touch; and the jumps and acrobatics of the horses are more than I can describe. If you have a chance to see them in person - please do.



So, February 3rd marked my 40th birthday. These "milestone" birthdays have never really phased me, but I was so blessed with such a special husband who went all out to make this special for me. He obtained a Google voice number and secret email account, which many of you used to send me birthday wishes and voice mails - thanks so much to everyone who participated! It was great to hear from all of you! Lee played them for me on the evening of my birthday and I was overwhelmed. Lee spoiled me, not only by surprising me with overwhelming emails at the above account (and voicemails at the Google voice account from family/friends that don't have Internet access and some that do) but with dinner out at Outback on Thursday, dinner at Ruth's Chris on Friday, dinner at the Hammond Auction on Saturday, and three birthday cakes (one Thursday, 2 Sunday) with ice cream, family, and friends, not to mention the HUGE cheesecake from Ruth's Chris (I've NEVER seen a piece of cheesecake that large!). He sent a huge and beautiful bouquet of flowers to work on Thursday. Then, he included some DVD's from a wonderful Christian, Southern comedian (Jeannie Robertson), as well as one of her books which she personalized with an autograph and personal message. Finally, he amazed me with a beautiful strand of pearls. Both my girls made me wonderful birthday gifts and found great cards, left me emails and voice mails, and spent the weekend with their grandparents! Lee called it "The Birthday of Excess!" - makes me want to turn 40 again and again.





Piper was THRILLED to get to dance not only at 3 high school basketball halftime shows but also at a halftime for USC and one for PC. It was so much fun to see her - at USC, we got into the "nosebleed" section, but in addition to seeing Piper on the floor, we could see her on the video monitor's live stream. The dancers did a great job and it was such fun to watch! At PC, I was treated not only to her dancing, but to see my students playing a sport they love - turns out that 3 to 4 of my current or former students were on the court the whole game. I really enjoyed watching them play.



Hammond's country of study this year was "Norway." The girls loved learning about all the polar bears, trolls, and all the adventures to be had in Norway. They enjoyed lots of wonderful food and stories and engrossed themselves in Norway's culture for the day. What a fun way to learn! It also made them appreciate the "Norway" section of EPCOT even more - in a future visit, we took extra time there for exploring and photos.



Hammond fourth graders are expected to study a different state throughout the year and then do a project and present an oral report about that state in February. Piper's state was Rhode Island and she did a great job. She did research on the state, found out about all the state symbols, sites to see, and other information and presented it to her class. She even included a RI state quarter in the "O"! It looked great and we are so proud of her!

For awhile now, Amber's been watching her friends loose tooth after tooth and waiting for hers to decide it was time to move on to the tooth fairy. Finally, in February, she was rewarded! In fact, she lost several all about the same time! She was so cute and so excited to get several visits from the Tooth Fairy! One of her teeth came out the week before a Disney trip - another came out AT DISNEY! The tooth fairy gave her something extra special for the tooth that dropped out at Disney World and Amber was thrilled!



Guess what happened in March? Expedition Everest, a thrill ride at Walt Disney World's Animal Kingdom park, turned 10 years old and the passholders were invited to its birthday party! Since it was during PC's spring break, we thought we'd take a short trip. The park stayed open an extra 3 hours for us and the girls and I rode it 5 times. For them, it was not enough. For me, it was three times too much! Lee rode it 3 times, and we all had a great time taking the weekend off and enjoying Disney. We stayed in a different resort this time - Coronado Springs - and I have to say, I highly recommend it. It was very nice and had great amenities. Piper got to go as an "adult" (over 10 year old) and LOVED getting the adult meals and enjoyed using her fingerprint to get into the parks. They grow up so quickly! Amber got to enjoy her favorite ride, too - Dinosaur! She loves the thrill of being chased by the big dino's and the movement of the vehicle, though she seems terrified each time we are snatched out of the jaws of the giant carnivore just before the end of the ride. All in all, a fast weekend but a fun one! We also got to see the Okampi up close and personal and EPCOT's flower and garden festival was amazing! We had such fun.



This year's SIGCSE (a conference for computer science educators) was held in Dallas, TX. I traveled out and enjoyed the many talks and panels tremendously. I wish the timing had been a little different, as they have many opportunities for children and I'd love to take the girls with me for one of them. I also missed some fun things at home while I was away, but Lee kept the home fires burning and the wheels turning in my absence.

While I was away, I missed two really fun events back at home. Hammond hosted its annual "Grandparents Day" celebration, where the kids grandparents are invited to tour the school with their grandchildren and see it through their excited little eyes. Though in the past, my parents and Lee's mom have gotten to come, they've never been able to come at the same time, so this year was a real treat - the girls had all their grandparents present and accounted for and enjoyed giving them the grand tour of the school. I also missed Piper's first dance competition of the year. Though there was a live stream of the dancers on the competitions website, it happened during the session for which I was chair, so I didn't get to see her. They did wonderfully, though, as the team came home in first place! Piper got to go up and accept the award for the group and she was so excited about this! Sunday, before I returned home, Amber, also growing up way too fast, got to sing in all three church services. She loves church so much and especially enjoys choir, GA's, and AWANAs! I know what you're thinking - poor Lee!



As another part of the state project that goes on all year for the fourth graders, they present a play where they dress up as something from their state, make up their lines, and teach all their parents and grandparents all about it! Piper chose to be the Rhode Island Red - the state bird - and she was the first of the 72 to present, with a "bak, bak, bak!" She looked SO CUTE in her costume and she did a great job leading off a wonderful production. All the fourth graders did a wonderful job - we were



"visited" by Elvis, JFK, Minnie Mouse, Gold, the Delaware River, a hula girl car bobber, and an Arizona tumbleweed! We got a "kiss" from Hershey, PA, and saw the flag of TX. Each year, the play is different and everyone did a great job!



Amber continued horseback riding through the year and really loves it! Alex is her favorite, though she has ridden a few others. She began to talk to me about having a horse-riding birthday party, and Lee and I agreed. What else could we do for our little cowgirl!



The end of March brought the first overnight fieldtrip for our family - in the fourth grade, the kids take a 3 day/2 night field trip to Earthshine in NC. Earthshine is a great educational experience that takes the kids back to the 1800's - they are divided into two groups - either Cherokee or Pioneer (Piper was a Cherokee) and for one day, they learn what it is like to be Cherokee (or Pioneer). Then, they switch places the next day. Piper got to catch and gut a fish, throw a tomahawk, make candles and food, etc. They slept in groups of six, and Piper's group was great. She had the best time. She came home exhausted and excited about all her adventures. We took time to type up a description of what happened so that she could have the memories while they were fresh (though I think she was becoming impatient with my constant questions) and Mrs. Kneece was kind enough to supply photos from all the fourth grade teachers taken while on the trip - you know how much I LOVE photos!



This year, the 4th grade choir joined the Hammond seniors to sing at Art Scene, a fundraiser for the arts at Hammond. It was especially special, as the parents of this year's seniors played a big part in starting fundraising for the arts at Hammond - when those kids were in the 4th grade! So, it was like completing a circle. It was very nice and a very enjoyable event.

What a fun time we had the second weekend of April - Piper and I headed to Spartanburg for her second dance competition and Amber and Lee met Carrie, David, and Kate at Riverland Hills for our church Easter egg hunt. They had a great time, bouncing in the bounce house, sliding down the slide, eating cotton candy, and hunting Easter eggs. They came home with a sunburn but had a great time! Piper and I came home after a fun time, and of course visited our favorite fast food in the upstate - Jack in the Box!



Amber was more and more excited about becoming 7 as the big day grew near. She was able to take in a fun birthday snack to school (chocolate doughnuts covered with sprinkles) and then, the next day, we headed to Country Adventures for a fun party. The weather that day was horrible, but cleared up RIGHT at 3pm, which also marked the start of the party. The kids rode a pony, visited all sorts of animals, took a fun hay ride, and then enjoyed roasting marshmallows over an open fire while eating hot dogs and birthday cakes. We had a great time in a beautiful place - the children ended the party looking at the lake and searching for the giant catfish rumored to live there. We had a great time and really can't believe our baby is 7 years old!



Easter was extra special this year, as we were joined by many family and friends - 15 folks filled our home with fun and laughter to celebrate our Lord's resurrection. Lee's mom and aunts, Jeanette and Rachel, came over along with my parents, Aunt Nell, and Kim. The Schellings also came and brought a WONDERFUL dessert to share. We had a fun egg hunt. The only semi-sad part was that Piper declared herself too old to hunt - she and Kim hid eggs this year. She's growing up!



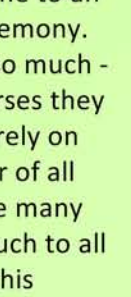
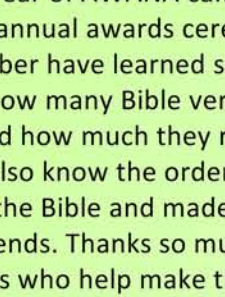
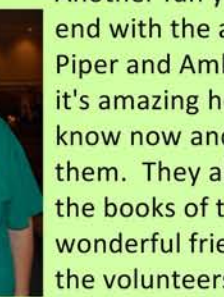
April brought a real shock to me - a friend at PC who worked in maintenance had fallen ill in February. He passed away in April. Frankie "Pork Chop" Ginn was the epitome of the type of person you expect to meet in the South. He loved to talk, was full of stories, and had amazing wit and insights, all delivered in a casual, Mayberry-like way. When I first met him, I was getting a new desk for my office - someone in administration had gotten a new one and I inherited theirs. He and several others had to get this desk (which barely fit in my little office) in and get my old one out. He introduced himself as "Pork Chop" and for quite awhile, I didn't know his real name. He was full of life and interesting stories and always had a smile

and greeting for me whenever I saw him. Over the years, I saw how much he cared for the professors and students at PC. He even gave me his cell phone number, in case I ever needed him and he was out on campus somewhere. Occasionally, when he was in the building, he'd drop by my office to ask about my girls, look at the latest photos, and tell me about his own two girls (who were older than mine). I loved talking to him - and never realized that the last conversation we had would be our last talk. Even though I didn't see him every time I came onto campus, I now think of him each time. I miss knowing that he might drop by with an interesting anecdote or just to check to see if I needed anything. I miss his kindness and his wonderful world view, which was one of the most accurate I've known in quite awhile. He was a strong Christian and I know he is with the Lord, looking down at us now. Rest in peace, Pork Chop. We all miss you.

We enjoyed a fun evening (just after classes ended) with the Physics/Computer Science majors in Clinton. Wayne and Suzie were kind enough (or is that BRAVE enough) to host all the majors and professors along with 9 children 11 and under! Everyone took a turn on Wayne's Segway, enjoyed basketball and pogo sticks, not to mention the zip line - AND came away unscathed! We topped off the evening with their daughter Amy taking the girls on a tour of the nearby Thornwell farm (near where Amber used to go to preschool) to see the 15-day old baby bunny (and other baby bunnies, piglets, chicks, and baby goats). The bunny's eyes were not even open yet! What a fun evening! Thanks so much to Wayne and Suzie for a great evening.



Another fun 4th grade project was to read a biography and then create a doll of the subject. Piper chose J. K. Rowling and created both J.K. and a little Harry Potter. They were on display in the library for awhile, then came back home. The end of April also brought "bring your child to work" day at Intel. It was awesome!



Another fun year of AWANA came to an end with the annual awards ceremony. Piper and Amber have learned so much - it's amazing how many Bible verses they know now and how much they rely on them. They also know the order of all the books of the Bible and made many wonderful friends. Thanks so much to all the volunteers who help make this wonderful program possible. Lee said he felt a special calling, so in the fall, he will begin working with the kids, too!

The beginning of May took us back in time and into the old west as the Hammond First Grade performed "Westward Ho" - this presentation was so much fun, as Amber and her friends told us interesting facts about the old west. Did you know that "Once we lived on the land for 5 years, it became ours forever." ? Amber told us! Some of the kids were dressed as famous characters and Amber got to show us how to square dance with seven of her friends in addition to saying her lines, which she had down the first day they were given to her. It was such a wonderful show!



After the show, Amber got to greet her Nana and Granddaddy and play around with her friends. One big treat was to play for just a few minutes on the Middle School playground - they have such interesting swings there!



The day after Westward Ho was the Hammond's annual "Fun Day" - this year, Piper (as a fourth grader) was one of the leaders of her team. It was the last fun day for the fourth graders and they had a great time. Siblings are on the same team, so Amber was with Piper and luckily enough, the fun exercises finished up JUST before it started to pour down rain. So, the traditional signing of the T-shirts took place inside and we then took off for the rest of the day.



May also brought the end of the children's choir and GA's at church for the school year. The beautiful choirs of the first through sixth grade were a lift to the soul and the GA's had set up posters and photos describing all their work and study through the year. These kids really accomplished a lot.



During the second semester, Amber showed an interest in dancing, so she started taking dance at Hammond. Her recital was so sweet!



During Hammond's last week of school, Cherie Herring and a crew of other teachers and parent volunteers put on a production of Disney's "101 Dalmatians" - a musical designed for kids. The first, second, and third graders were all Dalmatians and sang many wonderful songs. The fourth grade were the stars of the show - Piper played the part of a "Kanine Krunchie" and dressed as a Sheltie (creating her costume was a little challenging) and it was a WONDERFUL show. Other fourth graders were Scotties, Pink Poodles, Boxers, and even Cruella Deville! Piper's friend Lucy really nailed that part! It always amazes me how much great teachers can get out of great kids. It was AMAZING!



The last day of school was bittersweet this year - after weeks of "I can't wait to go to middle school" from Piper, she got out of the car and turned to say "I can't believe this is my last day in the lower school." After six years at Hammond, Piper's moving up to the upper school next year - fifth grade brings yellow halls and blue lockers and she's so excited; Amber, also, is moving to the "bigger" building of the lower school - the one for the second, third, and fourth graders. She's excited about second grade, but said she will miss Piper in the lower school. For the graduating fourth graders, there was a fun ceremony - they waved goodbye to the lower school at 10:30, then

4th Grade Walk to MS



walked the path to the upper school and into the Bank of America Theatre to give us parents a wonderful presentation about Earthshine (a presentation with photos from the trip and their words describing it) and a beautiful singing presentation. We left school with our friend David and a few more good-byes to friends and teachers.



Where  
Did  
The  
Time  
Go  
????



**K4**

**K5**

**1st**

**2nd**

**3rd**

**4th**



Feeling a bit nostalgic, we went back to Piper's first classroom at Hammond - in K4. she was a "Jones joey" and Mrs. Pound, Claire's mom, was helping. When Mrs. Jones left after that year, Mrs. Pound became the lead teacher and Piper loves her to death. After six years at Hammond, we've come a long way - it's hard to believe that time is gone. It certainly went in the blink of an eye.



Another treat on the last day was to receive Piper's travel journal back. Several students didn't get theirs back, which was sad - Piper was actually the only girl in her class (there are four 4th grade classes at Hammond) to get hers - it was so much fun to read and I really appreciate everyone (those we knew and those we didn't) who participated. I only wish all the children had their journals returned - they looked so forward to it and it is such a cool idea. At the beginning of the school year, each student wrote about what it was like to live in SC, then sent a journal to a friend/family member in another state. That person was to write a similar story and send it on. From September to May, the journal was to travel as much as it could, and then be returned to the school by whoever happened to have it. We were encouraged to include a list of names of people who we knew would participate, in case someone got the journal that didn't know anyone they could pass it to. I did that, and was so happy when her journal made its way back. It traveled to 9 states: Ohio (a couple of times), Massachusetts, Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, Texas, Colorado, Arizona, and Alaska before returning to South Carolina in early May. Thanks to all who participated and please thank your relatives who also participated. It was great fun to read and very educational. Many folks

included photos, too - the one of the snowman from Alaska made ours (that we were so proud of) look a little sad - it must have been 15 feet tall! We all love to hear real life events - one of the reasons I write this newsletter each year is to share our own. We also love getting newsletters from you. If you ever get the opportunity to participate in a project like this, please take the time. It means so much to the kids and is hard when some get theirs back and other do not. Also, please be on the lookout for Amber's journal in a couple of years!



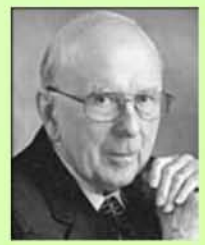
The weekend after school let out was a busy one - Piper's final concert with Strutt for the year. She and all the dancers did an amazing job and Piper was also thrilled that two of her friends were able to come on the last night and then spend the night with us.

This was the year of "40" - Lee also celebrated this milestone on Memorial Day. We had our usual Memorial Day gathering, but this year, it included a birthday cake and a few extra friends. My parents, Kim and Aunt Nell (now out of the cast and using a cane, slowly coming back), Lee's mom, and the Schelling's were joined by my Aunt Christine and our friends the Smith's. We had a ball, lots of great food, and a fun celebration for Lee. The girls and I had wrapped him a gift - really, a gift of gifts, with lots of gifts inside of gifts inside of gifts. At the end, he found some cash for electronics (his favorite thing!) and tickets to the Cirque du Soleil - La Nouba at Walt Disney World during our next planned trip in July. Not as cool as what he did for me, but I hope he enjoyed it.



Just after Memorial Day, Strutt held their annual tryouts for the dance teams for next year. Piper had already secured her spot in April, but Amber was interested - as long as it didn't interfere with horseback riding. She made the team she wanted and so next year, we'll have two performers in our midst - we're so proud of both of them! They also took a tumbling class through June, and Amber especially loved it - turning cartwheels on the first night! Next year (Spring, 2012), Strutt is to perform at Disney again. This time, both our girls will be on stage. I'm SO EXCITED for them!

During all the exhausting and fun chaos that epitomizes the end of the school year, we also decided to place our home of 12 years on the housing market. We've thought about moving for awhile now, but felt it was the right time to give it a try. We hate to leave our wonderful neighbors and awesome backyard, but we'd like a little more space. Where are we looking? All over, but will probably stay on the Irmo side of town. Though Hammond and horseback riding are on the other side, our church, Lee and my work, and dance are over here. Wish us luck!



June brought another time of sadness for our family. Back in the 1950's, a young doctor came to Sumter and one of his first patients were my mom's family. Dr. Givens was a legend throughout Sumter - he was the most amazing doctor I've ever met. He could look at you and know what was wrong after only a brief description - he followed up with tests, but he was rarely (if at all?) incorrect. Without Dr. Givens, I feel sure I would not have had the time I did with my maternal grandparents and that my Granddaddy

Huggins would have passed away more than a year earlier than he did. He also saved my dad's life when I was two. He was very matter-of-fact, always told the truth, and was extremely intelligent. But, one of the most comforting things about him was his great faith in God. Dr. Givens gave up his practice less than a year ago to fight cancer, which was a losing battle. We will miss you Dr. Givens - your friendship, advice, and caring meant the world to our family.



Vacation Bible School at Riverland Hills was once again amazing - they went to "The Big Apple" this year and once again, the decorations were awesome! The normal show for the parents went online on the churches website this year, as we had about 1000 kids and the fire marshal said it was too many to have on stage in the sanctuary. A wonderful problem! The girls had so much fun and learned so much as well.



June also brought a new experience for Amber - she got her braces. Hers are different from Piper's - an extender in the roof of her mouth that has to be turned with a key each day to help her little mouth expand to the proper size to hold all the permanent teeth on their way in and to help correct a cross bite. She's been a good sport about it, though I know it's uncomfortable. We're looking forward to the time when it no longer has to be turned. The hope is that, after this apparatus has done its work, the remainder of her teeth will come in straight and she may not need the other kind. Keep her in your prayers!



The girls ramped up their riding lessons in June, also - it is amazing to me how much they can grow when taking lessons more often. Amber's favorite is still Alex, but Piper has a new favorite - his name is Stumpy and he's HUGE. She confided, the first time she rode him, that it's the first time she felt short in her life! The girls are guiding their horses well, transitioning between gaits easily, and loping a lot. Amber was so proud the first time she loped Alex - she had loped (aka "cantered") before, but Alex is a fast little pony and she was scared to lope on him. Once she did, she was hooked and so proud of herself! The girls are taking on more and more responsibilities with each visit to the barn and they love to ride.



June also brought distressing news from PC. The poor economy has been taking a toll on the college as it has with everything else. However, after a committee studied ways to keep the school strong, they made the decision to make cuts in several locations on campus, one of which was computer science. Our program no longer includes a major - only a minor. Personally, I feel this was a mistake, as computer science graduates are about the only ones who can obtain employment right now, but CS departments are usually smaller than other programs in a liberal arts environment. I hope my friends in administration, who also get this newsletter, will work to correct this mistake. It saddens me that we only have a minor at the moment, but I'm working with my colleague to get our current majors through and strengthen the minor to the point we can (hopefully) have the major return. While it was a decision I never expected, God has a plan for each of us and I eagerly await His guidance.

July brought what we are calling the "summer of firsts!" The first "first" was that we went on four different trips this summer. We usually go on one (or at most, two). On each of these trips, we wanted to try to do something different than we had done before. The first trip we scheduled was to Disney World. We had never seen the fireworks at the fourth of July and heard they were amazing. So, we requested a favorite area of Pop Century so that we could see the fireworks from EPCOT and the Magic Kingdom from our balcony and headed south.



The first "first" was attending the Tomorrowland Terrace Fireworks and Dessert Party. Wow! We were served all you can eat dessert consisting of everything from juicy fruit, cookies, brownies, and tarts to wonderful chocolates, cupcakes, crème brule, and things I didn't recognize but were SOO good. After eating, we could sit back and relax while the fireworks began. It was beautiful! Tinkerbell lit up the sky and then flew (down a zip-line) straight at us! It was also not crowded, as you have to pay for this reserved event, so there are a limited number of people on the terrace. A lovely way to begin our trip!

The next day, we did our second "first" - the first water park for our family. We looked at the two Disney has and settled on "Typhoon Lagoon" as our choice. I have to say, I was a little reluctant to agree to a day in a water park - it's not really my thing, but the girls wanted to do it so badly they saved their money and paid their own admission into the park! After a really fun few rides on the "Crushin' Gusher" (a water coaster - very fun), we walked through the park and found the scuba experience. It's really scuba assisted snorkeling (SAS), as you never leave the surface of the water, but you are fitted with scuba gear and 30 minutes of air. Piper, Amber, and Lee took to it quickly and moved off into the pool to view the fish; it took me a little longer to figure out how to breath, but once I did, it was such an amazing feeling and view. We really enjoyed it, but it was very cold! Amber stayed with the dive instructor, Eric, and he showed her the clownfish nest, the baby blue tangs, the sharks and sting rays. In fact, about half way through, I saw Amber taking a break on the side and asked if she'd like to go back out with me. She said she'd like to go out, but with Eric because he knew what he was doing! (She calls it like she sees it, doesn't she?) To me, that was the highpoint, but we continued to have fun, visiting two family rafting rides, enjoying the lazy river, and exploring the surf pool until the 6 foot wave chased us out! Wheeee!





Our third "first" was the fireworks for the holiday. The Magic Kingdom had their show on 7/3 and 7/4, so we went there on the third. It was amazing and awesome - fireworks were not only behind the castle but all around in the sky. It was just beautiful! On the fourth, we headed into EPCOT to hear the Voices of Liberty sing acopella for a 30 minute performance of patriotic songs. We met Mickey, Goofy, and Donald in their patriot outfits and also ran into Benjamin Franklin and Betsy Ross. Between showtimes, we wandered through the other countries, filling out passports and enjoying the street performances. Lee was asked to join the group in Italy and ended up playing Superman! (How fitting!) This was his second time in the spot light, as in the Magic Kingdom the day before, he was "That Guy" in the Monster's Inc Laugh Floor. This meant that whenever they needed to end a joke, they put Lee up on the big screen and said it was all because of "That Guy!" They gave him a special sticker at the end of the performance that he managed to keep from Amber (an amazing feat in itself!) We couldn't decide whether to be in EPCOT, MK, or Hollywood Studios for the fireworks and were hot and exhausted, so we went back to our room and watched all three from the balcony. It was beautiful!



Our fourth "first" was to view the Cirque de Soleil performance of La Nouba - if you have a chance, this alone is worth a trip to Lake Buena Vista. It was just amazing. The tickets were part of Lee's birthday gift and we loved every minute of the performance. Of course, Cirque de Soleil does travel around the country - they are certainly worth any trip - again, it was SO amazing!

The fifth "first" of the trip was a visit to "Beaches and Crème" at the Beach resort for a taste of the legendary "Kitchen Sink." This amazing dessert was seen by the girls on youtube and they just had to try it. It consists of 8 scoops of ice cream, a jar of cherries, an entire can of whip cream, and 16 other toppings (chocolate sauce, candy, angel food cake, brownies, bananas, etc.) We didn't finish it, but we gave it our best shot and it was really great!



We found a new favorite ride experience - the "Sum of all Thrills" - a ride simulator that lets you create your own roller coaster and then ride it - it was AWESOME. We also went to Mickey's Backyard BBQ and the Luau at the Polynesian for the first time. Both were amazing shows with lots of fun and entertainment accompanied by wonderful food.



Of course we enjoyed many other things during our visit - the fun rides and experiences, strangest of which was a flock of ducks that suddenly decided to walk across the Magic Kingdom in a row - for no apparent reason!



We got back from Disney and , after a couple of days, headed north to the mountains of NC with our friends Todd and Carrie Schelling. We had a great time and began the trip with another "first" - we met the Schellings at a gem mine and purchased a bucket of dirt to mine. The kids had the best time, with David, Kate, Amber, and Piper all finding really cool gemstones in the dirt. Some of them could be cut into jewelry. Emeralds, sapphires, and amethyst were some of the girls finds - David and Kate found sapphires and rubies. It was really fun! We also enjoyed the wonderful waterfalls, ice cream shop, and smores at the campfire, complete with ghost stories. Piper and Amber overcame sliding rock (Piper going into the 6 foot hole!). It was so much fun, we hated to leave, but we did, picked up Tango and Snowball, and headed down to the beach to join family.



Our beach trip to Garden City brought us a surprise and an unplanned "first" - right outside the condo where my parents, Aunt Nell, and Kim were staying, there was a loggerhead sea turtle nest. What a fun find! There was a lady (the "turtle lady" for lack of a better title) who checked the nest each day, set traps for crabs (who like the eggs) and told us they should hatch in early September. Might be worth a trip back down! A bad first also occurred: someone dug up our tent (the new one we just bought) and threw it in the ocean. If Daddy and Kim hadn't been up for an early morning walk, we'd have lost it to the sea. However, they got it back and it was ok. Tents had been vandalized all down the strand.



It was Snowball's "first" beach trip and he was just not too sure of those waves, though by the end of the trip, he would carefully follow Amber out (or did she drag him on the leash? I couldn't tell!) It was also the "first" time in quite awhile we had professional photos done at the beach. Mama and Daddy joined us, and Tracy Floyd (Incredible Smiles Photography) did her usual excellent job. She did the last beach photos we'd taken and I'd recommended her to our friends the Schellings

last spring - she did a great job for them, too. We love the photos - the only problem is that with so many that were so good, it was sooooo hard to choose our favorites!



The other big "first" for this beach trip was an adventure we've wanted to try for awhile - parasailing! Kim mentioned how much she wanted to go. Piper "piped" up immediately, wanting to join her godmother. Lee and I also wanted to try it out - Amber said "No Way!" - so the four of us left the Marlin Quay Marina early one morning to sail along the ocean and parasail above it. It was the quietest, most peaceful thing I think I've ever felt. Amazing! Even my fear of heights didn't dampen the occasion and Lee and I took photos from the air and the boat, as did our guide. We all can't wait to do it again!



Aunt Christine joined us as well this year and we relaxed under the tent during the morning hours. Piper also saw a friend at the coast - Avery - and she joined us for a viewing of Harry Potter. The girls' friend Riley was next door again and everyone had a great time in the pool and on the strand. I love the beach - what a fun and relaxing trip.



Our last trip of the summer was to PA to visit family. Lee's mom has a new cottage up there in Patterson Grove and we wanted to see it before she returned to Sumter in August. It was a fast trip of four days, two of which were travel, but it was really great to see everyone. We also got to visit the cemetery and Lee's dad for a short time - it's hard to believe it will be four years this January that we lost him.



Our "first" for this trip was the first time to actually **CATCH** a chipmunk. Piper and Amber joined their cousins Morgan and Kamryn in the plot. They really surprised us by doing it! They put bread under a box and when the poor little thing went under there, jerked the stick holding it up out and a chipmunk they had! Of course, then came the debate of what to do with it - none of them were really sure, so the chipmunk took things into its own hands, knocked the box over, and headed for cover! The girls' eyes were as big as saucers and the squeals were exciting as the little fellow ran straight at Piper to get into the bushes. We all laughed and laughed.



The girls also joined Jeanette and Rachel at the last night of their church's VBS - they love church! Amber reported it as "awesome" and Piper stayed to help clean up with her Aunt Jeanette. It was great to see everyone and we hope our next trip can be a little longer. We also got to visit family - Aunt Pearl, Aunt Phylis, and Leonard and Muriel. It was so nice to see them all and we wish it could have been for a longer time. It was a fast trip, but a fun one.



Some people ask us how we survive all these long car rides with two (still young) children. Our answer? We've been doing this since they were born, so they're used to it. We also have exciting places on the other end of the trip, so they like that. Then, there's always fuzzy pipe cleaners!



After a summer of anticipation, Piper and Elaina were finally able to get together. They had a great time with a first of their own - tubing down the French Broad River. They also went fishing (caught three pretty but too small ones) and had their usual wonderful time together. Our family is so happy to have Elaina and her family in our lives - these girls have been best friends since three years old, despite living at least two hours from each other from the time they were five!

The girls ended their summer with boot camp at Southern Strutt and riding their two favorite horses - Stumpy and Alex. We had a busy but fun summer, with school just around the corner!



All too quickly, our summer came to an end - August came and we were preparing for school with a second and fifth grader - I can't believe it! Amber's teacher is Mrs. Long - who we were lucky

enough to have as Piper's teacher, too. She was a little worried that Piper won't be in the lower school, but has gotten along so well. She loves Mrs. Long and is so excited about reading! Piper has joined Mrs. Roberts class. She's now in the middle school at Hammond and the really big deal is that she has a **LOCKER!** Unfortunately for our 5 foot tall daughter, her locker is on the bottom! But, she spent a good part of the summer planning just how it will look and had magnetic white boards and lights ready for that all important day. The day before school began, the 5th graders had an ice cream/locker decoration party - what fun!



To add to the stress of the start of school, Lee and I got some exciting news. The Saturday before school started, a couple came to look at our house (on the market since May) and on Monday they asked to purchase it. We accepted their offer and started looking for a new place and the perfect one opened up. It's larger than the one we have now and the girls already love the neighborhood - the community pool, equestrian trails, and (best of all) some friends who already live there! We had from August 15 to September 28 to get everything together and coordinated - Wow! But, I'd rather it be fast than not at all. The Lord really looked out for us - everything we needed was provided at the right time and everything we were concerned about was answered. You should have gotten a change of address card for us, but in case you missed it, our new address is:

**OUR NEW ADDRESS:**

104 Steeple Crest South Road  
Irmo, SC 29063

Just before school started, the girls were offered a free lesson at the East-West Karate School - they LOVED it! (Especially since they received their white belts the very first day ;) We signed them up for lessons and they really took to it - by September, they had already earned their yellow belts. The belt graduation was really nicely done - we saw kids from all the classes show off their skills. It ended with the parents joining their children on the floor and then giving them their belts. How exciting!



Piper's birthday came just days before the move, so we just celebrated at school - her friends decorated her locker and she brought a huge cookie cake to share! We also had a small celebration at home in between all the packing of boxes with Nana, Granddaddy, Aunt Nell, and Kim (who also helped us pack - thanks so much!). What did she get for her birthday? Several things to decorate her new room, and - FINALLY - her own phone!



Well, we were all set to move - the movers had actually taken our furniture and we'd been on sleeping bags for two nights. That's when we found out that the bank for our buyers, Allied Home Mortgage, apparently couldn't get their paperwork together. After much trouble, we finally were able to close two days later and the movers were kind enough to bring our furniture back on Saturday. We were so happy to get into the new home and I have to say I will NEVER willingly do business with that bank - not only were they full of excuses, but they were so unprofessional as to avoid phone calls from the



**Hello new home!  
We love you!**

attorney and the realtor. They claim to be really big - that's the problem. They just don't care. However, we are in the new house and we love it! The Lord really looked out for us - everything fell into place as it needed to do. Our realtor, Linda Keels, was a big help and brought the buyers of our home to us - then showed us the perfect home for our family. We certainly have a lot to be thankful for this year.

**Goodbye First  
House - we had a  
wonderful time  
with you!**



We got news that they had funded the loan and all was final as we started Hammond's annual Fall Festival - it was a wonderful phone call and the festival was a great way to celebrate the new house - cotton candy, snow cones, and great company to share the news. The 5th graders helped with the games, so everyone had fun. We came home to a new house that night and gratefully welcomed our furniture the next day. The following week at Hammond was "Spirit Week," which provided a challenge, as all our clothes were in boxes!



We had PJ Day, Crayola Day (Piper was yellow, Amber was purple), Salad Dressing Day (Piper was "French" with a barrette and striped shirt, Amber was "Ranch" dressed as a cowgirl), and then Red/White/Blue day. It was definitely an interesting and constantly moving time of our lives!





As October wore on, we started to unpack towers of boxes and really enjoy our new home. The horses sometimes are ridden on the streets through the neighborhood and it's so nice to look out the front window and see a horse and rider going by. Because there are woods around, there are also deer, apparently, as we've seen them as well - wandering through the yards in the evenings. We got to participate in a fun neighborhood tradition - "Boo-ing"! One night, the doorbell rang and when we went to answer, we found a bucket of Halloween goodies on the doorstep. According to tradition, we then had two days to create two buckets to leave on two other doorsteps. We snuck out in the evening and the girls left buckets on neighbors doorsteps and ran after ringing the bell. What fun!



The weekend of Hammond's fall break, we took a break from unpacking and headed to the state fair. We met the Schellings there and the kids had a great time on the rides and with the games. We saw lots of other Skyhawks there and the children really enjoyed meeting their friends and talking with each other. After the mandatory corn dog, fries, and elephant ear, we headed out for the day.



October brought some sad news. After successfully coming back from heart surgery this summer, Lee's uncle, Leonard Baer, passed away. We were shocked, as he had been doing so well. He was such a special person; he retired from US Air after 36 years of service, loved hunting and fishing, and was an excellent trombone player. We were thankful we got to see him this summer. We will miss him.

Hammond fifth and sixth graders got to enjoy a fun party the Wednesday before Halloween - the annual "Monster Mash." There were lots of stations set up, bouncy slides and obstacle courses, and a lot of fun for all. Piper dressed as a pirate, complete with parrot and sword. It was a lot of fun!



October also brought some festive fun with our Sunday school class - we all went to "Country Adventures" and had a blast - hayrides, pony rides, petting zoo, hot dogs, and smores. What fun!

October 29th brought the girl's first horse show. It was at the Red Bank Recreational Center and put on by the 4H clubs. Since it was near Halloween, there were many fun classes, including a costume class, where horse and riders dressed for the occasion. Piper and Amber were competing against each other in three classes and Amber was one of the



youngest contestants there. Both were very excited and Piper came away with a ribbon in every class - two 5th place and one 6th place. They dressed up as a pony princess (Amber and Alex) and a pirate (Piper and Mona). Amber was especially beautiful, and living the dream of riding a white pony dressed in royal gown! We were so very proud of both of them and look forward to many shows in the future.

The next day, Ascott held a fall festival for the residents and we got to meet many of our neighbors. The girls each got feathers put into their hair (this is much the fashion statement - I had no idea) and then we enjoyed a show from Cold Blooded Encounters, who brought many cold blooded creatures for the children to see, touch, and learn more about. We had a Carolina Wolf spider, a tarantula, a box turtle, a bearded dragon, a White's tree frog, and three different snakes, the largest of which was a boa that was just over 6 feet long. Each child had a chance to pet the boa - Amber had none of that, but Piper was all over it. We can tell which child grew up watching Steve Irwin, the Crocodile Hunter and which one didn't! We left a bit early from the fall festival so that Lee and the girls could head to church to join Awana's "Crazy Hair Night" - a fun annual tradition. What a busy day!



Halloween morning started off with the Lower School annual parade. Amber was a pink and black cat this year, and boy was she cute! She and all her little friends strolled through the halls and then had a fun party that afternoon. The "theme" for the 2nd grade teachers was the "YMCA" and they looked awesome! After school, Piper and Amber went with Lee to Intel for a fun afternoon of "Minute to Win It" games and trick-or-treating. Then, they headed home and we joined the Shulers across the street for some pizza and cookies before heading out for trick-or-treating through the neighborhood. We had over 100 kids come by (only 1 group of repeats that I noticed) and the girls came home with two bags filled with candy. What fun! We really are enjoying our new home.



November brought a reunion with a friend - Morgan Swygert! Her birthday party was at the Sease corn maze, and Piper and Amber went to celebrate with her. Amber's favorite part was seeing Morgan again. Later that weekend, Amber sang in all three church services. The second and third grade choir have such angelic little voices - it's what it's all about.



November also brought a trip to Portland, OR for attendance at the Grace Hopper Celebration of Women in Computing conference. It was a great experience and also great to see close to 3000 technical women in attendance, 1100 of which were college and graduate students. Some were from Pixar (their first time at GHC and a treat for me)! While it was wonderful to see so many women, it was a little disheartening to learn that we still make up only about 20% of the field; it is difficult for me to understand it, as my women students are often top in the class and computer science offers some of the most flexible scheduled jobs in today's workforce. Also, in this economy, while most fields are losing jobs, engineering and technology jobs are growing. It's a great place to be, so encourage your daughters (and your sons) to at least take a look! While I was gone, Piper's friend Elaina dropped in for a night (a fun surprise) and when I returned home, the girls had decorated the van windows to welcome me back!





On November 7th, we added a wonderfully adorable addition to our family - Welcome, Ryann Grace Gonyer! We can't wait to meet you in person! Congratulations, Becky, John, Morgan, and Kamryn! (And, thanks to Facebook, from which I blatantly stole these pictures!)



November brought Early Technology Week at Hammond for the 5th grade. This is something that every student looks forward to from the moment they hear about it. Throughout the week, the 5th graders join six naturalists to learn about early technology - it's really an amazing program. The kids started off the week in Mr. Mancke's cabin with a wonderful story about how early technology developed. Then, they split into six groups of about twelve each and went to one station each day, to learn how to make it on their own. I was amazed at the amount they learned in this wonderful experience. The hands-on way they were taught really stays with them and it was certainly a week they will never forget!



Piper's group was the "arrowheads," and their first stop of the week was with Mr. Tom Mancke at the "Deer Foot Station." Did you know that every part of a deer was used by the Native Americans? These kids took a foot (JUST the foot, remember), used a sharp rock to skin it, take the tendons off, separate the bones and the toes, and then stretch the hides over a grapevine circle with raffia. Meanwhile, they broke the bone apart, used the marrow to make a candle (with the help of a seashell and cattails) and then sharpened the bone to create an awl. The hoofs came home to create a rattle or necklace out of. The sinew and tendons are dried to create rope. Apparently, even the scat of the deer was mixed with tree sap to create very tough glue. What fun! No one was even squeamish (if you don't count the parent helpers - ha, ha!).

The second day was "Gourd Working" day for Piper's group. They took a pure white gourd and by the end of the day, had cut it with a sharp stone (Piper tells me this was VERY difficult!) and cut a circle in the front. They emptied the gourd of a paper-like substance and seeds; then, they worked with it and "Mr. Michael" (Michael Eldridge) to paint and color it a beautiful brownish reddish black. Then, they took a paper pattern and a bone awl and pounded a pattern into it. It's just beautiful! They came home with this beautiful gourd container.



The third day was "Cordage." Piper's group learned how to create rope from poplar bark and the learned how to make it longer and stronger as they twisted and turned the material. From this, they made beautiful necklaces and bracelets (some got tired a little sooner than others!) and then they moved on to learn how to knot string in such a way as to create a beautiful rope drawstring bag. Finally, they learned the technique of finger weaving and created a woven length long enough to create a belt. They did a wonderful job and learned a great deal from "Mr. Raven" (Benjamin "Raven" Pressley).





On the fourth day, Piper's group worked to create "Primitive Paint" - they took charcoal, pigments, egg yolks, and water to create paint, created brushes from river cane and horse hair, and then painted pictograph stories on gourds. It was beautiful! The goal was to explore ancient art and learn how our early ancestors expressed themselves. Thank you, Jaiy Geno!



The last day, Piper's group created "Rivercane Flutes." They took river cane, used a hot screwdriver to poke holes into the cane, tuned their flutes, and later used a blow torch to decorate it. "Hawk" (Hawk Hurst) was their teacher and it was really amazing to see what these kids can do as well as hear them play - the music they created was beautiful with an almost haunting quality. The station Piper's group missed was called "Burn and Scrape" - the kids used hot coals, hollow reeds, flint, and shells to make a mortar and pestle. I hate that each group had to miss one station, but each one needed a full day's dedication. They learned so much this week - it was amazing!



Well, after a month of begging to have friends over to the new house, I finally relented (even though there were still boxes everywhere) and Piper invited two friends, Avery and Ivey over to spend the night and Amber had her friend Lindsey come for a "sleep over" as well. When neighbors also came over, our house was filled with the wonderful sounds of little girls playing, laughing, and fussing (a little) with each other. It was wonderful! It was the same weekend that Hammond School won the state championship in football for the sixth year in a row - great job, Skyhawks! We all watched the game on Hammond's Internet TV channel, so we got to enjoy the game without the cold this year.



After a close call with Snowball (not coming) during the move, we decided we needed some professional help for our mischievous little bishon. Craig, from "Dog Training in your Home" has been coming the last few weeks, working on some basics (like "come"). We're better, but still working on it. Tango is also not barking as much - thanks, Craig!



Our annual trip to see Santa went well and he was informed of all the items on our list. Frankly, this house was all the Christmas Lee and I could ask for! Mitchell's Photography did a great job and the girls love to go and see Santa each year. This was our 8th Christmas trip - time does fly!



This year, we celebrated Thanksgiving in our new home - it was the first meal in our dining room and we had a wonderful time with my parents, Boyce and Martha, and Lee's mom, Madi. Todd, Carrie, David, and Kate Schelling came for dessert and the children really enjoyed playing. It was wonderful. Then, after everyone left, I realized that, once again, I was so distracted with getting the meal on the table that I didn't take a group photo. I did, however, have a photo of Amber's Thanksgiving message from school - she's giving "THANKS" for "The big home," "Having friends," "A family," "Nice food, yum," "Karate," and "Sleepy Bear." My sweet girl!



**Merry Christmas,  
to You and Yours!  
Love,**



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