

Meeker Family Christmas Newsletter - 2012

Merry Christmas All! Well, another year has come and gone - time certainly flies, doesn't it? It seems to fly even faster as I look at it through my children - my babies are now 8 and 12 - how did that happen? We were blessed with many fun adventures this year - I hope you were, too. As with most years, we suffered sadness along the way, but 2012 has been a good year. Let me tell you all about our year...

December, 2011 brought many exciting and fun experiences. Piper and Amber had their second karate belt graduation - from yellow to orange. They love karate and are working hard. Once again, we enjoyed the Intel Christmas party. Intel gives a lot to their employees - it's really nice to be appreciated and fun to get together. A nice meal, dancing (well, Lee doesn't really look forward to that part) and a fun "Roaring Twenties" theme equals a wonderful evening and date night!



The lower school at Hammond offered a wonderful Christmas program, filled with the beautiful voices of the lower school children. Amber loved dressing up in her black and silver and looked adorable! My parents got to come and enjoy the show with us. The sound of Christmas carols and children singing, the excitement in the air and the anticipation of the holidays really put you in the holiday spirit!



We are so grateful for the gifts God has given us - we feel so undeserving and so thankful. We were also very thankful for my parents, who came over and helped us unpack and get rooms in order and to Kim, who helped us get the house decorated for Christmas. We had a great time hosting our Sunday school's Christmas party, filled with fun, food, and friends, as we looked forward to our first Christmas in our new home.



December brought a sad goodbye - "Skydancer" our 2006 Prius had over 200,000 miles and the start of transmission troubles. So, we purchased "Mist" a 2012 Prius V and said farewell to a car - funny how we get attached. Of course, I do spend a lot of time in my car!

This year, Santa had some surprises up his sleeve. Instead of lots of toys, this year, he gave the girls things they could enjoy in their new house - both have always wanted a full length mirror, and this year, that dream came true. This year, Santa engaged in a scavenger hunt, so the girls, after finding a few things under the tree, followed Santa's hints and clues to discover a basketball goal and a swing set. Amber and Piper kept following the clues which ended with Santa inviting Amber into her attic space - opening it up, her face lit up with excitement - Santa had turned her secret passage (aka "attic storage") into a wonderful play room. Amber immediately christened it "Purple Place" (it was painted purple) and has loved her personal space. Thank you Santa! After having some fun with what Santa brought, we spent the rest of our Christmas holiday with family and friends - we had a wonderful time!



January brought some fun and excitement - East West Karate hosted a Friday evening of breaking boards! The girls were taught the correct technique and then they each got to break three boards using hands and feet. What fun!



This year, we got to enjoy both Piper and Amber at high school and college basketball performances. Amber really loved performing and, after an initial nervous first time, looked forward to each one. The girls were especially happy to get to dance at PC - they love going where I work and always hope to enjoy Dempsey's pizza before leaving town. Nana and Granddaddy joined us for this trip and we introduced them to Dempsey's before leaving town and heading back home.

We never dreamed, when we had children 3.5 years apart, that we'd have two in braces at the same time! Amber had a brace in the roof of her mouth for several months, but February brought a change - enough of her permanent teeth had come in across the front to allow for brackets. So, she and Piper are now both in braces their friends can see. These days, the orthodontist makes each trip fun, as the color of the braces can change with each check-up! Piper usually chooses blue or green; Amber started with "shocking pink" and now sometimes asks for a different color on each tooth. (I'm glad Dr. Ramon's staff is so patient!)



February brought a very sad time for us - Aunt Rie, at age 101, went to join the Lord. Marie Arnold was such a kind, loving person who always had a happy and "glass half full" outlook on life. She taught me how to make her famous "Jelly Cake" and I have taught my girls, to continue the tradition. During her life, Aunt Rie was a strong Christian, a wife for 78 years, a wonderful sister, who held my Granddaddy's hand as he passed (her little brother), one of 13 children, and a kind and thoughtful aunt, mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. I think about how the world changed in her 101 years - and it just amazes me the things that she saw and experienced in life. We will miss you, Aunt Rie.



The girls continued their riding lessons and ramped them up a little in February, as they were planning to head to Charleston for their second horse show. This time, they wanted fancier outfits, and were so excited when we found their favorite colors - Piper loved her new green and Amber sparkled in pink! Country of Study day at Hammond is something the lower school looks forward to every February! This year, the kids learned all about Thailand. Amber created some cool artwork to help decorate the walls of the school and enjoyed hearing and learning about Thailand, trying the food, enjoying the music, and all in all, having a fun day! Piper, now in Hammond's middle school, wasn't sure she would get a country of study day, but Hammond didn't let her down. Her favorite part was trying the food! (There's Huggins in that child!)



Well, even though we were having a fairly light winter, our yard never seemed to dry out. After some tests were done, it was determined that we had a natural spring near our property - oh, boy. This was causing our front yard to turn to mud at every step on the grass. So, we had to have a french drain installed (no fun). It was HUGE, but now, there are several fingers through our front yard and the drain goes down around the back of the house, down the back fence, and takes the water away from the yard. The drain was finished and new grass put in the day before Amber's birthday party in April.



Once again, Madeleine Schep, Nieves McNaulty, and I brought the computer science women of the Carolina's together, to network, learn, present, and grow at the 2nd "Carolinas Women in Computing" regional conference. With speakers from Duke University, Intel, It-oLogy, Microsoft, NCWIT, MUSC, and NBA Digital, this was a wonderful weekend full of inspiration and great advice.



The hardest thing about CWIC was that it took place on the same weekend as the Coastal Island Horse Show in Charleston. So, Lee took the girls for their show and I was so proud of them! Amber came home with a second place ribbon and Piper brought home two more ribbons. I'm so glad they've found a sport they enjoy. Of course, with or without ribbons, it's the experience that matters and they had a wonderful time. Piper set her hopes on joining Hammond's equestrian team and Amber has told Mrs. Joy (their coach) that she'll join as soon as she's allowed!





Well, 2.5 months after bringing home a new car, Mist was rear-ended. Thankfully, the children weren't with me and it was a relatively light hit - no one was hurt and the gentleman had State Farm insurance. We were THRILLED that it wasn't Allstate - from our experience, the worst hands you could ever be in. Within two weeks, all was fixed and taken care of. Mist is back, good as new. We were just glad that, if it had to happen, no one was hurt!



This year, my favorite computer science conference was held close by - in Raleigh. I presented a poster and hosted a BOF session, both on travel classes in computer science. It was really interesting to speak to other professors who have worked to develop travel classes for computer science majors and fun to speak to those who had never thought about it and were eager to try it. I also met a wonderful group of people - the "Association of Christians in the Mathematical Sciences" - ACMS. I went to a lunch meeting with them and it was awesome to hear what they do, promote, and are working toward. The ACMS looks like a great group and I look forward to learning more about them in the future.

March brought the first dance competition of the season - Piper is on the team that competes, so Amber had a bit of a break and could just enjoy the dances while Piper and her team got up on stage in Charlotte. As expected, they did well. Go Strutt!

Well, I have to say we are so proud of Piper. This year was the first year we had broken our rule of "church activity and one other activity." Piper loves dance and wanted to continue, but with dreams of joining Hammond's equestrian team, she also begged to take lessons during the school year. This summer, we also started karate - it was a wonderful way to build confidence. Amber, not to be left out, wanted to dance, ride, and "hi-yah" too. So, this year, Monday's were spent riding, Tuesday's and Thursday's at dance practice, Wednesday's and Sunday's were spent at church, and Friday's were for karate. All this with Piper's homework and study schedule ramping up to middle school expectations. However, each quarter, Piper rose to the challenge and made the honor roll. The third quarter was the first time Hammond allowed the fifth graders to participate in the assembly award ceremony, and we are so very proud of Piper. She's learning more this year than I remember forgetting! (I find, in some cases, that I am NOT smarter than a 5th grader! It certainly gives a new appreciation for that fun TV game show!)



March brought another wonderful Hammond production - the second grade play took us around the world, learning about various countries and their traditions, as we followed Henry Hawk. Each child had different outfits to match the country they represent and Henry, after traveling around the world, ended up with Amber's group, who represented America! Cherie Herring does amazing things with these kids! The play was awesome and Amber loved dressing up in her red, white, and blue.



As the year has progressed, so have the belt levels of the girls - March graduation took them from Orange to Purple. It's such a pretty color! On to blue...

This year, Grandparent's Day at Hammond brought a new challenge - it was the 1st year that the girls were in different areas of the school. So, the middle school kids get to tour with their grandparents first; then, they head to the lower school. Amber was the only tour guide for the first time in her Hammond career and enjoyed having Nana and Granddaddy to herself. Piper also enjoyed showing them around the middle school - new territory! It's really nice for the grandparents to get to share a day at Hammond with the children.



For awhile now, I've been feeling like there was a need for a computer club at Hammond (and really, at every school). After speaking with Mrs. Blair Lowry, the middle school principal, we officially started March 28th. We learn about a "computer scientist of the week," talk about a topic of interest, and then program the rest of the time. They LOVE it! We are using a visual programming language called "Alice" and they can't get enough. It's a lot of fun.

This was a Disney year for Strutt and we were so excited as we prepared to go - made our plans back in October! Unfortunately, a short time before we were to leave (well within the "you can't get your money back" phase) Disney canceled the time slot for the girl's dance. It was the first time I've experienced Disney acting unprofessionally - there were over 100 kids whose plans were destroyed. Those who booked through the studio were told they no longer had reservations. Those who booked themselves (like us) were told there were no refunds. Bad show, Disney. We were so disappointed, but, as plans had already been set (not only for us, but also for my parents, Lee's mom, and Aunt Nell and Kim) we headed down and decided to

celebrate Amber's birthday while we were there. Even Tango and Snowball joined us and stayed (once again) at the pet resort they've built on Disney property. It was nice to have family there, enjoy the EPCOT Flower and Garden festival, and Amber loved the wonderful desserts she received. We ended up the trip with the Fireworks and Dessert party and watched the amazing show over Cinderella castle. We still love Disney, but were very disappointed in the way they chose to treat us this time. Hopefully, a onetime occurrence - nobody's perfect, after all.



Also, in March, Piper had to say goodbye to a friend - her favorite horse, Stumpy, was to leave the barn for a new home in Charleston. That's the hard part - Piper loves Stumpy and is happy he has a forever home; however, she

certainly misses riding him. Alex, Amber's favorite, is certainly beloved by our family as well.



In the fall and spring, Hammond offered the parents the chance to come and see the talent of the middle school during Open Studio's day. Piper loved sharing her artwork and we love seeing it - Hammond really knows its art and the work produced by these kids is simply amazing! Mrs. Ramsby does a great job!

After going to the Easter service at Riverland Hills Baptist (which always has a beautiful cross of flowers), Easter brought family and friends over for a fun meal and egg hunt. With our new backyard, there were many new hiding places! So many, in fact, that as far as June, we were still finding eggs as they were moved from hiding places by wind, rain, and (possibly) little squirrels! What a nice and relaxing day.



Piper continued to compete in dance, going to three competitions this year. At the second one, her friends Avery and Ivey joined us for the trip to Spartanburg. After the competition, we headed back home, stopping in Clinton so that Piper could introduce her friends to her favorite pizza, Dempsey's. Always nice to have friends along!



April brought the end of church activities for the school year - the girls really enjoyed choir and "Girls in Action" (GA's). They learned wonderful songs and all about mission work going on - helped with Operation Christmas Child, and had bake sales to raise money for missions. Their teachers really made learning more about God and His work fun!



Amber has really enjoyed her dancing this year - so she wanted to have a dance-themed birthday party. Miss Kimberly McManus came and gave a fun dance lesson for the kids who performed for the parents just before being picked up to leave. They danced to a song from Phineas and Ferb and enjoyed the dancing, the costume change, and just being together. We were joined by Nana and Granddaddy and Aunt Nell and Kim as well as 12 guests. It was a fun party!



Throughout the year, once again, AWANA was a wonderful experience. This year, Lee volunteered and really enjoyed the games with the kids. He also helped with the audio/visual presentations. He really enjoyed it and found it so much fun that he volunteered again for the 2012/2013 year. Piper and Amber both finished their books, memorized lots of Bible verses, and had a wonderful time. AWANA teaches them so very much - I can really see a difference. If there is a program near you, I would strongly recommend you get your kids involved. AWANA is from age 3 through 6th grade at our church. I can't believe that Piper only has one more year of AWANA and Amber has moved from Cubbie to Sparky and next year will be in TNT. Time really flies. I'm so proud of my AWANA family!



Even with the french drain installed, Lee and I have noticed some interesting water wildlife in our front yard - we are often visited by "Freddy" the green tree frog, and "Tommy" the worm eating turtle. Hope they aren't trying to tell us something!



Each year, starting in fourth grade, Hammond students go on overnight field trips. This helps them to gain independence and get to know each other better. This year, the fifth graders visited Williamsburg, VA for four days. We had Piper at Hammond at 5:30am on Monday morning; they toured Jamestown and Williamsburg that day, and hit their little beds around 10 that night. Then, Tuesday and Wednesday, they continued touring Williamsburg from 7am to 10pm each day. Thursday, they left Williamsburg and toured Yorktown before returning to Hammond about 7:45pm. We had a tired daughter on our hands, but she was squeezed to death by her sister, who really missed her. Her adventures included learning Colonial Dance, meeting the characters throughout Williamsburg, hearing some awesome ghost stories, and so many more exciting things - too many to count! What a great time. Hammond really tries to give the kids awesome hands-on learning experiences.



Fun day offered the usual excitement! This was our 7th fun day and the first one without Piper's participation. Amber and her team had a wonderful time and enjoyed potato sack hops, three-legged races, obstacle courses, and all the usual fun. There were a few fifth graders there (those with younger siblings) and they were all little zombies, as this was the day after their Williamsburg trip. Amber ended the day with the usual signing of the shirts and then we headed to Clinton to complete PC exams, eat Dempsey's pizza, and back home for Amber to get to spend the night with a friend. It was a very fun day!



Fun Day Group!



The week before Mother's day, Lee traveled to Oregon for business, but the girls and I stayed rather busy. Piper was more down than usual - I suppose having been away from home the week before and then her Daddy leaving the next Monday. However, Mother's day, we celebrated having all the Meeker's home again with a fun family gathering. Aunt Jeanette and Aunt Rachel, traveling to PA from FL for the summer, were here also. So, we were able to celebrate not only Mother's day, but three May birthdays - Mom's birthday was actually ON Mother's day, Aunt Nell's birthday was to follow the next Friday, and Lee's is at the end of the month. We enjoyed grilled chicken, hot dogs, and hamburgers with family and friends.



From March to May, I enjoyed going to Hammond on Wednesday afternoons to lead the new computer club for the middle school. It was a wonderful experience and the kids were so excited about computer science! We only had about six meetings, but plan to continue on into next year. Our last meeting, we held a competition - the kids had to design an Alice project to tell what Henry Hawk (school mascot) was going to do over summer vacation. Henry had



grand adventures, going to Tanzania (next year's country of study), meeting giant frogs, playing football, and even getting sunk on the Titanic! Mrs. Roberts, Mrs. Priester, Mrs. Wilking, and Mrs. Lowry were kind enough to judge the contest, having five categories to judge each animation - in the end, by 0.6 of a point, Piper came away the winner! I wish I could have made them all winners - they all did a wonderful job! Each participant received a medal and Piper came home with the programming trophy. It was so much fun! I hope they all come back next year and bring their friends!

The last Monday of the year, Hammond middle school had its annual awards day. Piper was recognized for her "Math Counts" membership and many very deserving students gained awards. It was a proud day for all.



After 7 years at PC, I'm taking a sabbatical in the fall, so while I'll still be doing some work, I won't be teaching. It seems strange to begin the summer without planning out my syllabi for the fall (or at least thinking that I need to ;*) More as the letter goes on...



It's hard to imagine that we now have a 6th and 3rd grader. Where has the time gone? Both girls enjoyed their last days of school, Amber's filled with parties and yearbook signings, Piper's with tests and yearbook signing! When taking my annual "Reading Tree" picture of Amber's class, I was a little sad, as Piper was now in Hammond's middle school; so, I asked her teacher and snuck in a photo the next-to-last day of school. What two sharp looking groups we have here!





The last day of school corresponded with night one of Southern Strutt's end of the year concert. Lee and I once again enjoyed the 3.5 hour display of amazing talent that comes out of this studio, excited that this year, both our girls were on the stage of the Koger center. There was a repeat performance on Saturday evening and then Strutt workshops and placements for next year the following week.



Memorial day brought our usual annual cookout - we really enjoyed having Mama and Daddy, Aunt Nell and Kim, Mom, Todd and Carrie, and David and Kate over for some great hot dogs,

hamburgers, BBQ, ribs, and all the fixin's. After we ate, our neighbors, Laura, Cara, and Mariclaire, came over to join in the water balloon fight. It was so much fun!

The last day of school brought Amber's report card - she did wonderfully, especially excelling in art and music. She loved this year and really grew so very much. Next year, she will get her first grades - we are looking forward to an exciting third grade year! Piper's report didn't come until June first, and was posted online. We were so proud that she was on the honor roll for the year. We were especially proud of the sweet comments from her teachers, which included the words "tenacious learner," "mature approach," "outstanding attitude," and "active participant." We want our girls to do their best (no matter what their best is) and those words mean more than the grades. Lee and I are so blessed.



In June, I found out that Hammond wanted me to also take on the lower school with a computer club. I am excited for the challenge and in the fall, will host the club on Monday's for 1st through 4th graders. The 5th through 8th graders will meet on Wednesdays. What a fun and exciting challenge!



The second Friday in June, Piper and Amber went to Seven Oaks Park with East West Karate for their belt graduation. They worked very hard and are now blue belts! Now, on to green...

The second week of June brought a fun week of Vacation Bible School. Hard to believe that this will be Piper's last year - they go through 5th grade. She can volunteer next year, though. The theme is "Spacequest" and they are taking more than 900 kids each day "To Eternity, and Beyond!" The decorations are amazing and we are so thankful for the wonderful work put in by so many volunteers to handle all of these kids. Many do not attend church or are friends of a member, and now these kids will hear the wonderful news of Jesus Christ. It's a wonderful ministry!



On June 15th, Presbyterian College announced their new, 17th president in a formal welcoming ceremony. Dr. Claude Lilly will succeed Dr. John Griffith, coming from Clemson. We welcome Dr. Lilly and say a fond farewell to Dr. Griffith. We will miss you, Dr. Griffith, and wish you all the best in this next exciting stage of life. We welcome you, Dr. Lilly, and look forward to your leadership of PC into the future.



Lee left for a business trip at the end of the month - for a three day trip to Silicon Valley! While there, he had time to see some of the sights. He ate at Pier 39, saw the Golden Gate Bridge, visited the Intel Museum, and toured the Computer History Museum. Wish we could have gone with him - I'd love to show the girls California!



While Lee was gone, we had a real treat. Snowball started barking and wouldn't stop. When Piper investigated, she and Amber got SOO excited. In our front yard, by the front door step, eating my flowers and the newly planted grass, were twin fawns! They are so beautiful and sweet, we don't mind (as long as they don't eat them all!). We enjoyed having him back home and sharing photos with each other.



We noticed in late May/early June that a wren family had decided to make the top of the column of our front porch home. Well, the little babies decided to take flight in early July. There were two babies - one took flight fairly quickly, but the other sat on the porch a little while - out of the nest. His mama kept bringing him worms and encouraging him; eventually, he took off and joined the world of flight!

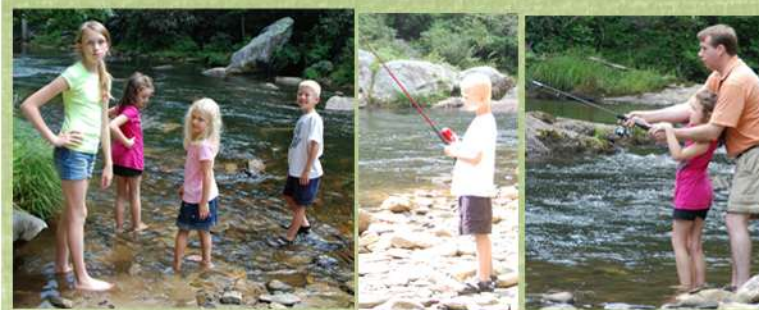
We had a quiet celebration for the Forth of July - enjoyed hamburgers and hot dogs with Mama and Daddy. It was a good day.



In early July, we headed up to Sapphire, NC (near Cashiers and Highlands) with our friends the Schellings to enjoy the mountains. We had a ball! On the way up, we stopped by the roadside to enjoy the wonderful view. Then, we headed to Walhalla Fish Hatchery, before checking in at the cabin, Memory Mountain Lodge. The fish hatchery is in SC, just below the state line - it was really cool to see all the fish. We even got to feed some of them. They release the fish in 10-12 different rivers/streams in SC to replenish the trout population. They



are really beautiful fish. We then got the idea to go fishing!



So, before crossing state lines, we stopped at a nearby stream for a picnic and little fishing. Amber wasn't into it at first, but got excited as time went on. Piper had her worm snatched by a smart little trout. David caught 2, but turned them loose. Todd came home with one and it tasted delicious, but wasn't enough to feed our group of 8. Fun, though! We did have a visit from a 3 to 3.5 foot long black snake while there - the first snake we've ever seen on one of these trips. He just wanted to get away from us, and quickly slithered across the path and into the bushes (which we then avoided!).

Early morning on our second day, Carrie, Lee, Piper, Amber, and I hit a mountain trail and really enjoyed the ride. Piper followed our guide, riding Hershey. Amber behind Piper rode Sebastian. Then came me on Speedy, Carrie on Pokemon, and Lee brought up the rear on Snickers. We had a great time. Our guide was full of information about the land around us, sharing stories of the Indians in the area, where names of lakes and areas had come from, and how certain plants had been used for medication. It was really fun - we enjoyed the Whitewater Equestrian Center and their horses. With over 400 acres of land that had been in his family since the 1700's, he knew a great deal and there were lots of trails to explore. Our guide also pointed out signs of wildlife - including where little bears had overturned rocks, scratched the ground, and where he'd seen one while out on the trail. We had a great time!



After the trail ride, we found a nice spot for lunch and then did a little gem mining - taking a bucket of dirt and running the water through it in the sluice, the kids found some beautiful stones! Piper was especially excited - her bucket contained a large amethyst!



We attempted to go tubing after the trail ride, but there were lightening storms in the area, so we were rained out. So, we decided to go exploring the falls in the area. We were told about a little waterfall named after a Columbia, SC student. Turns out that these falls were named for Hammond School student Dorothy Ehrlich Walker. Unfortunately, in 2003, Dorothy was killed in an automobile accident on Hwy 281, the summer before her senior year. Her classmates cleared the trail to the falls and named it in her honor. It was an honor indeed, to find the trail and hike to the falls. It was a beautiful tribute by loving classmates. Our four Hammond School students enjoyed the beauty of the falls immensely.



From DEW, we went to what we call "Small Slidey Rock." There is an official Slidey Rock Falls, but we didn't make it there this year. This is a smaller version, where lots of people go to slide. There were probably 40-50 folks there when we arrived, but we stayed long enough for it to clear out a little. The kids love the natural slide, but the water is really cold! Here, too, we had a visitor - a striped water snake who wanted to get out of the way of all these people as quickly as possible. Most of the people cleared out of the way, too! The water was really cold - take a look at Piper's expressions! Everyone enjoyed sliding into the pool at the bottom of the falls! Amber slid once, then enjoyed the pool. There was also a little dog there who loved to fish - he was determined to get one, too! It was a very fun afternoon.



We went into the Highlands for a little shopping (Colonel Mustards has the best jelly and preserves!) and, after supper, we went to Sweettreats - a favorite ice cream spot. While there, the Schellings discovered that Sweettreats is the location of a geocache. We had to find it. Once we did, Amber was really all in for finding more. There were two more in the area, so off we went! Geocaching is like a huge treasure hunt. Participants hide little boxes (geocaches) at certain GPS locations and post them online. Then others use GPS devices to find them. Sometimes, the caches have small prizes inside that you can trade for a small prize of your own. We found three in the Highlands; one was at Sweettreats; the other two were in a state park. The views were amazing! The trail was fun, too - I felt like Brer Rabbit going through the briar patch - not because it was thorny, but because the trees completely covered the path - like walking through little tunnels. Amber was very proud - she found one of the caches. While you know the GPS location, you still have to hunt for the actual cache. She had a ball - we may have to get into this! For more information, check out: <http://www.geocaching.com/>



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After two failed attempts to go tubing (thwarted by lightening storms two afternoons in a row) we decided to go in the morning, even if it might be cold. We headed out to Highland Adventurers and got all suited up - water socks, swimsuits, and lifejackets, then loaded up a van and headed to the river. It was so much fun! Good thing we bought that water camera last year! Just as we were getting out, there was rumbling in the distance and it once again rained all afternoon.

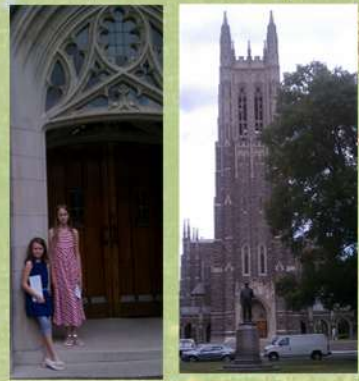


Well, the rain continued all afternoon, so we didn't know if we'd get a campfire. It was our last night there and the girls were really hoping for one. We sat on the porch telling ghost stories until 8:30, when the rain finally stopped. Lee and Todd built a small campfire and we roasted marshmallows, had smores, and told a few more ghost stories. You have to have a campfire in the mountains!



The next day, on our way home, we stopped at White Owl Falls - a very pretty little waterfall not far from the DEW Falls we visited earlier in the week. We'd purchased a book on waterfalls at the Tubing place - glad we did or we probably wouldn't have found this one! The trail was a bit hidden and the book told us just where to find it. There is a nice natural pool at the bottom of the falls and the kids enjoyed moving rocks around, making a small dam and finding salamanders (both orange and black)! Also off of Hwy 281, this is a really pretty falls I would love to visit again!

The day after returning from the mountains, I had my annual appointment with Dr. Klett up in the Raleigh/Durham area. While I don't look forward to the 4.5 hour drive, she's such a great doctor that I keep it up once/year. This year, Piper wanted to see the campus of Duke University. She thinks that she may want to attend one day. So, with her Granddaddy, sister, and I, we stopped by admissions, got a campus map, and walked part of the beautiful campus, through the library, by the chapel (Amber said it must be a good school to like God so much!) and then to the student center for lunch. The girls were thrilled that everything looked like a castle - even having the "Great Hall" where the students eat! (For those of you who are not Harry Potter fans, this won't mean as much, but Piper and Amber ate it up!) We ended at the book store and grabbed a couple of T-shirts. We may have two Blue Devils in our future. Oh, the tuition bill!



The following week, Piper went to her friend Elaina's in NC and Amber got to enjoy equestrian camp at Joy McMillion's farm. Each day, from 9-1, she and several other 7-10 year olds rode the horses, did crafts, learned about the horses and their care, and had a great time. Amber's favorite part? She got to ride Alex standing up! Joy had an acrobatic attachment for the saddle and all the kids got to do a



superman pose and ride standing on his back. She STILL hasn't stopped talking about that! Meanwhile, Piper had a great time at her friend Elaina's - they always have fun together and always hate to part. Such wonderful friends!

The girls then headed south to Garden City to enjoy the beach with their Nana, Granddaddy, Aunt Nell, and Kim. Work meetings kept Lee and I away until the weekend, but everyone had a great time. The girls loved the pool and Piper's friend Avery got to come twice to play. On a shopping trip, Amber saw, begged for, and purchased a chemistry set and had a great time doing many of the experiments inside it - my future scientist! We also saw a sandcastle in a shop made out of over 250,000 jelly beans! Saturday brought a fun adventure - parasailing! We'd gone last year with Piper, but this year Piper's friend Avery wanted to come and Amber decided that she'd like to try it, too. Once on the boat, we discovered that Piper and Avery couldn't go up alone (they didn't weigh enough), so Amber went up with Lee and me, then again with Piper and Avery. We saw dolphins and sting rays - it was beautiful. The family also enjoyed having some time to spend together - after church on Sunday, we stopped in Litchfield at this beautiful tree. It's a place we always mean to take photos, but never actually stop - well, we did this year and took several family shots. We also celebrated Daddy's birthday a little early, letting him open his gifts before we had to leave. The last day we were there, Aunt Nell's granddaughter-in-law, Jennifer, brought the great-grands - Gracy and Brandon. The kids all played together and we hated we had to leave, but work and appointments called. Hopefully next year we can stay longer. We love the beach!



Piper and Amber enjoyed a wonderful riding lesson with Joy when we got back from the beach - during the equestrian camp, Amber had gotten to try vaulting (acrobatics on horseback) and she LOVED it. Joy was kind enough to indulge me and let me watch at the beginning of this lesson, as Amber showed Piper and Ellersley all she's learned and then let them try. Amber is such a little daredevil! Piper and Ellersley got the hang of it and declared it "really fun." I just love to watch the girls - their balance is something I envy, I tell you! Joy taught them the basic position, "around the world", the flag, and how to dismount safely, all while the horse is moving in a circle. Alex was the horse of choice - he's so tolerant and he listens well. It was really amazing.



Just before the start of school, the girls were missing Disney - so, we packed up and headed to FL for a little fun before we got back to the everyday routine. This year, our new thing to try was DisneyQuest. This is the dream arcade! Virtual reality rides, make your own roller coasters (and then ride it in a robot simulator), and play as much of the 80's arcade games as you want! The food was also excellent - a new quick service favorite. While there, we became "Pirates of the Caribbean", rode Aladdin's flying carpet through the streets of Agrabah, and became live bumper cars with Buzz Lightyear. We also traveled down a river in a virtual Jungle Cruise. Great place for a bunch of computer people like us! We also enjoyed the fireworks and dessert party in the Magic Kingdom, where we played the new Sorcerers of the Magic Kingdom game. This was so much fun! Also, when you think about the technology behind it, it was rather impressive. Merida was also in the Magic Kingdom, giving out autographs and archery lessons. Part of New Fantasyland was open - the new Dumbo ride. Love the waiting queue for this one now - you'll have to try it!



Amber and Lee decided to help find Perry in EPCOT and we found a location in Animal Kingdom where we found the hippo swimming underwater. We visited Typhoon Lagoon and Hollywood Studios. Tango and Snowball enjoyed Best Friends Pet Care and we toured the new resort, Art of Animation. One of the most fun aspects of this trip was coming back to the room at night - our cleaning lady made sure that every day, Amber and Piper's toys enjoyed the day, watching TV, having a picnic, or just hanging out in the window. She made it so much fun to come back to see what they'd been up to while we were in the parks! Disney is wonderful - no matter how often you go, there's always something new to try!



This year, the day before school started, Amber went to meet her teachers and Piper went to iPad training, so Lee and I split up to be with each one. Hammond has gone to an all iPad school, where every student, K4-12, has their own iPad. Each student has to sign an agreement to care for their iPad and follow all school rules. The local papers were interested in this and Piper and Lee made the Sunday paper, along with some of her friends - Ivey and Lizzy. Meanwhile, Amber was very excited to meet her teacher, Mrs. Hydrick. Piper was thrilled to be in Mrs. White's homeroom this year, and the year started with a rush! "Meet the Teacher" day is always so much fun! Piper also took that opportunity to decorate her locker - this year's theme is black and white! It happened to work well with this year's country of study - Tanzania.

The next morning we were all up early, to greet the first day of school with all the excitement and thrills it required. I can't believe we have a third and sixth grader - where has all the time gone?



August brought some great joy to some great friends - meet Jason Brian Wells, Jennifer and Brian Well's first son. He is so cute! Piper and Amber were just in awe - not only that Jason was so sweet but also that Jennifer trusted them enough to hold him. Congratulations! Enjoy him - it seems like only yesterday Piper and Amber were in my arms like that. Now, the only problem is that they are pestering Lee and I for a baby brother!

With school starting about a week earlier than usual, we celebrated Mama and Daddy's anniversary a little early this year - it was fun to go spend an evening.



This year, Piper was eligible for sports at Hammond and eagerly signed up for the Western Equestrian team. Team photos were that first Saturday and she proudly wore her sparkly top, chaps, boot, and hat with the other team members. I think it's going to be a great year!

The girl's school photos were also wonderful this year - they are growing up so very fast!



Last March, I was able to start a computer science club for the middle school at Hammond - it was so much fun! The kids were so engaged and really wanted to dig into programming! This fall, I was given the honor of also working with the 1st - 4th graders as well as the middle school. They are so excited about programming and we are having a great time!

This past summer, Piper received an invitation to take cotillion lessons - so September brought the first of 6 meetings and two dances. She looked so grown up as she left me to join her friends and meet new friends. She said she already knew what they taught her the first night (guess Lee and I've done something right) but was delighted to get reacquainted with her friend Sara, who left Hammond after 2nd grade. The hardest part was finding dresses that were knee-length or below for my 5'4" daughter! We finally went to the ladies departments - did you know they actually make XXS and 00 sizes? I'd certainly never seen them! But, they were a perfect fit for Piper and she looked so beautiful. She and Amber are growing up way too fast.

September also brought Piper's 12th birthday - it's so hard to believe that she has been with us twelve years... the time has just flown by. To celebrate, Piper wanted to invite a few friends over - just the kids she eats lunch with. Well, she had 8 guests her age and Amber had two friends herself, so we were a house of 12 - what a fun and exhausting birthday!



The girls continue to love riding at Joy's - and are getting better and better! I love to watch Amber lope around the ring - she has so much more control now and Alex looks like he's flying!



This year, Lee and I marked a milestone - 15 years of marriage. It's been a wonderful time - full of many happy, sad, exciting, frustrating, amazing memories. Through the years, we've owned two homes, three dogs, three birds, and been given two amazing girls from the good Lord above. It's so hard to believe it's been 15 years - it seems like only yesterday we were saying our vows, being taken by horse drawn carriage to our reception, and heading off to Blowing Rock, NC for the first half of our honeymoon and then leaving for Cherry Grove, SC for the second half. We've seen and done a lot through the years. We're looking forward to many, many more!



Earlier this year, Lee also found our "brick" on the USC Horseshoe that he donated in honor of our marriage - 15 years ago.



At Hammond, September also brought "Spirit Week" - with lots of opportunities to dress up. Tacky Day and Neon Day were two favorites!

We closed out September with Hammond's annual Fall Festival in the Lower School. This fun fundraiser is full of cotton candy, popcorn, pumpkin decorating, dunk tanks, pie throwing, and lots and lots of excitement (fueled by plenty of sugar!). This year, there was also laser tag, Wii Just Dance, and lots of bouncy jumping things. What fun!



The first of October brought a fun trip for the Hammond sixth graders. This year, instead of having a trip in the Spring, their trip was to Tybee Island, GA, in the fall of the year. The weather was wonderful and so was the trip (except for all the bugs!). At Tybee, the kids got to experience the wonders of the natural world along the east coast - they learned about the marshes and their importance, the wildlife there, and so many other things. Piper was thrilled to get to hold turtles, snakes, crabs, and other things, see dolphins, have a squid grab her finger (ok - not thrilled about that, but it was "cool"), see the shrimp, alligators, and lizards, and have a fun three days with her friends. It was a wonderful experience for them!



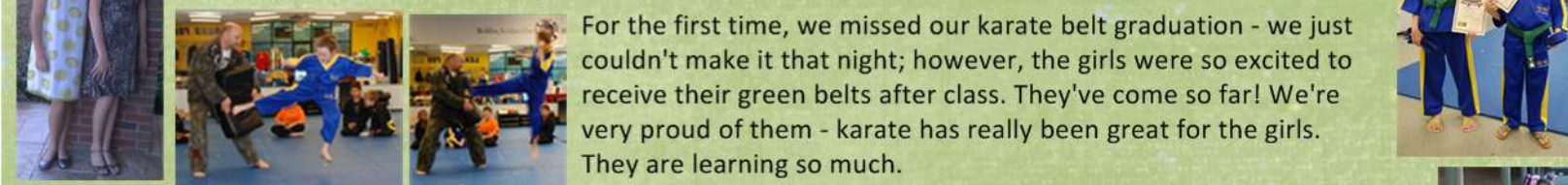


For the girls fall break, we had a special treat. What did we do? Travel to a favorite location - Walt Disney World for "Mickey's Not So Scary Halloween Party." Our timing throughout the night was great - we were almost first in line to see the Seven Dwarfs, didn't have to wait too long on Jack Sparrow, and walked right in to the Prince/Princess and Mickey/Minnie character meets. We enjoyed the fireworks from afar, met some hitch-hiking ghosts, and of course, visited the 999 happy haunts of the haunted mansion! A special treat was that "New Fantasyland" - the area Disney's been constructing for the last couple of years, was open for a dress rehearsal. We got to participate in Belle's Enchanted Tale, drink some Lafou's Brew (very good, but pricy), and took the Journey of the Little Mermaid after meeting Ariel in her new grotto. It was a great treat! We also visited Animal Kingdom

during the weekend, taking the Asian walking trail through the birds and animals and rode our favorites - Expedition Everest, Splash Mountain, and Thunder Mountain Railroad. It was a short and exhausting weekend, but so much fun!



Piper's second cotillion practice was as much fun as the first. Piper even won a prize for doing her homework! Lots of learning going on - this week they also got to learn some dance moves. The girls feel sorry for the boys - they apparently have more to remember!

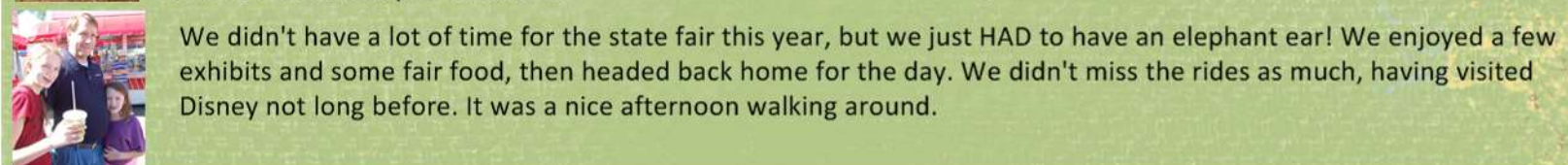


For the first time, we missed our karate belt graduation - we just couldn't make it that night; however, the girls were so excited to receive their green belts after class. They've come so far! We're very proud of them - karate has really been great for the girls. They are learning so much.

We were pleasantly surprised to get to see Mama on her birthday - she'd gone on a road trip with Daddy and stopped by the house on the way home. We found out she was coming and were able to have a cake ready to celebrate!

The fifth and sixth graders at Hammond enjoyed their annual "Monster Mash" party - a fun couple of hours of not thinking about homework, playing games, taking pictures, and socializing together.

We didn't have a lot of time for the state fair this year, but we just HAD to have an elephant ear! We enjoyed a few exhibits and some fair food, then headed back home for the day. We didn't miss the rides as much, having visited Disney not long before. It was a nice afternoon walking around.



The last Saturday of the month, the Hammond western equestrian team and the local 4H group sponsored the "Spooktacular" Horse show - this year, Piper went to Mrs. Joy's the day before the show to help get all the horses and tack ready to go. Then, we arrived the next morning bright and early to help set up for the show. It was so much fun - Piper came home with three ribbons (second, fourth, and fifth) and Amber gained a fifth place for her collection (she wants a ribbon of every color!). Amber also took good care of her horse - making sure he had enough hay to snack on during the day - Alex was happy about that! It was a long and amazing and fun day!



The equestrian team had their first team practice in October - the group got together after school and worked with the horses for three hours. Joy, their coach, had gotten about 14 horses together for them to ride, trade off, and take care of. Part of being on the team is also knowing how to take care of the horses, clean the tack, as well as having the correct posture and riding positions. Piper, Laney, and Claire are the middle school team; the rest are in high school. I love how all the kids work together to help each other and take time with smaller children at the barn. Their first meet is in November!



**SPOOKY
COMPUTER
SCIENCE**
"Tech or Treat!"



My lower school computer clubbers had a little Halloween fun this year - we went "tech-or-treating" through the lower school library - the kids went from station to station, gathering pages for a booklet of "Halloween-ish" computer science terms and some candy and games along the way. We had a lot of fun! My middle schoolers met on Halloween day, so we had a smaller crowd, but they also got the booklet and some candy for the day. It was fun!



We really enjoyed the traditional lower school Halloween parade on the morning of the 31st. Our little zebra was joined by all her friends as they marched through the lower school. The third grade teachers also dressed up - as the Hammond equestrian team! They were dressed perfectly, having borrowed some of the actual western attire from the team members. Way to go ladies! We ended the day with a fun photo of Amber's class and left them to a fun day of parties and spelling tests!

The Shuler's were kind enough to invite us to their annual pizza Halloween party - we had a great time and then a group of about 18 kids left with Lee and Carla to go trick-or-treating. How would you like to see this group at your door? :) Amber and her friend Mariclaire enjoyed the trick-or-treating, but Piper got a little tired, so after a bit of candy fun, she came back and had fun with me on the other side of the door - giving the candy out to the kids. We had a great time and I enjoyed having the company!



Report cards came out after the first quarter for Piper and she was so excited! She made Hammond's "Distinguished Scholars" list - reserved for students who make all A's. She woke up the morning of the ceremony with her eyes dancing. I loved getting to watch her cross the stage. We're so proud of our hardworking girl!

Our Sunday School group came over for chili and fun - we played the "oldy-wed game" and learned some very interesting things about each other and our mates! We laughed so hard it made our sides hurt! In fact, the kids watching the movie in the next room came in to quiet us - we were making too much noise! All together, kids included, we had about 30 folks - so it was a busy and fun night! The kids played outside for awhile and then the younger ones came in to watch a movie - the older kids played "capture the flag" until they were called to go home.





The second weekend in November, the Hammond Western Equestrian Team got together to have a three hour practice before their upcoming show on 11/17. At the end of the practice, the team had a picnic at the barn, after which they presented a trophy and certificate to the young lady who, at the Spooktacular 4H horse show in October, showed excellent sportsmanship, took extra good care of her horse, and showed wonderful spirit for the team - Miss Amber Meeker. Her face was priceless! She was not expecting it and it meant so much that the team thought so much of her. Sarah and Seth presented it to her and she was so very proud.

November brought a wonderful choir performance at Riverland Hills - the children's choir sang out in the worship service and their beautiful voices rang out in the sanctuary. The third graders also had a special part - eight of them read out Bible verses. I love to hear them sing - it is so very sweet!



The Hammond School Equestrian Team headed to Camden in November for three horse shows - Piper's first with the team.

Everyone did so very well! There are only three kids on the middle school team (Laney, Claire, and Piper) and the three of them pulled off a second and two thirds as a team for the three shows. Piper brought in two third places in her first two shows and rode so very well. She was so excited about the show! Her friend Claire got two seconds and a first - she was so excited! This was the first show for both Piper and Claire and they did an awesome job! Amber, not to be left out, put her name in for a raffle and won a bucket full of horse toys and books! She was just jumping up and down and eager to go through the bucket with her friend Mackena. It was a wonderful, cold, exciting, fun, and exhausting weekend! We're so proud of our team!



Well, this is the first year our youngest gets letter grades and she came through with flying colors! All A's and one B+! We have two excellent scholars in the family. Amber was so excited to hear her grades and we were just as excited to hear the wonderfully sweet comments from her teacher. What a great way to start the school year!



Thanksgiving brought a time of rest and peace for our family. We enjoyed a traditional dinner together and laughed and talked. What a beautiful fall day. The only thing that marred it was that Aunt Nell was in the hospital after suffering a TIA and discovering a severely blocked artery in her neck. Thankfully, the doctors were able to clean it out Friday morning (after Thanksgiving) and she went home to recover on Saturday. What a thing to be thankful for!

As usual, Mitchell's Photography (Greenville, SC) brought Santa from the North

Pole for some pictures and wishes. Amber took a catalog to show Santa exactly what she wants! Piper started meeting Santa at Mitchell's 9 years ago - so she and Santa gave each other a high five to celebrate. Amber also gave Santa a high five - she's been seeing him her whole life!



We wish you all a very merry Christmas and a most wonderful new year. Hopefully, 2013 will bring many happy memories for us all to share together.



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