

# Merry Christmas! Meeker Family Annual Christmas Newsletter, 2013

Well, another year has come and gone and here we are again. It certainly has been exciting and busy (as usual!). I'm so glad I get to share it with you! I'd also love to hear all about your year - hope it was wonderful!

Thanksgiving, 2012, brought a fun and relaxed time spent with family. We had a wonderful meal and a wonderful visit together. Then, I FINALLY remembered to take a family photo. It's the first time in three years that I remembered to take the Thanksgiving picture! Every year, I'd pull out the camera and then, we'd have such a great time, that I'd forget. I was so happy to remember this year!



Once again, the day after Thanksgiving, Edwin – our “Elf on the Shelf” arrived. He was very much the hider this year – appearing in several places for Piper and Amber to find. Amber's friend, Mariclaire, carefully wrapped her elf in a towel (if you touch them, their magic is gone!) and brought him for a visit. The two elves enjoyed sitting atop some of our Christmas decorations as the girls played. What fun!



December's cotillion brought a fun event – the “Holly Ball.” Lee and I had the honor of chaperoning and it was so much fun to see all the girls and boys dressed in semi-formal wear. Piper is surely growing up way too fast!

December also brought Karate graduation to brown belts – the girls have come so far since beginning. They're determined to become black belts. Amber has confided to me that she's SURE that Disney will like that and it will help her realize her dream – to become a Disney Imagineer!



What an exciting day! Dr. Ramon pronounced that it was time to take off the braces! Piper and Amber, somehow, timed it just right together and they both got them off on the same day. Dr. Ramon's office supplied them with a celebratory cup of all the “forbidden goodies” - popcorn, bubblegum, etc. It was the biggest smile I'd seen in two years!

We had a fun time in our lower school computer club, going over Christmas themed computer topics and having a little party. The middle school club had a party also, having a competition as a part of it. They made iPad apps using a language/app called "Codea" and I was so proud of what they did - on their own and modifying code they found. These kids just love it!



Another part of what makes Christmas so special is the beautiful voices of the children's choir at church. Amber and her friends sang to us so sweetly! That's what really makes you ready for Christmas. The children put in such hard work to prepare.

The last week before school lets out for Christmas is always exciting in the lower school. The kids have their annual Christmas party and put on a show for the parents and grandparents. It's a time when the children are so excited and Christmas spirit is everywhere. Mr. Lalumondier is always a fun Santa Clause and Mrs. Augenstein and Mrs. Hydrick are always around for hugs! We love these days of happiness.





The middle school doesn't have the same parties and shows as the lower school, but there was excitement for Piper as well. Before Hammond let out for the holidays, there was another horse show, this one in Georgia. We headed down for the day and Piper rode well, gaining a sixth place ribbon. It was a bit of a drizzly, rainy day, but all the kids did well and worked hard, despite the weather. It was great for pictures!

Meanwhile, back at the barn, Alex showed everyone what a good sport he was. Sporting a

Santa hat, a red tree skirt, and striped socks, "Santa Pony" posed for several photos with the kids at the barn. (He was a bit grumpy afterwards!)



The girls worked very hard after leaving school for Christmas - they wanted to gain another belt in Karate - there was a camp where, after completing MUCH work, they would move from brown to brown-black. These two worked hard and graduated to the next level! On to red!



I received my Christmas gift early this year - Lee took us on a whirlwind trip to Disney! I just LOVE to see the lights at Christmas! We got to see the castle at night, the Osbourne Family Spectacle of Dancing Lights in Hollywood Studios, and enjoyed the Christmas Parade. We all wished it could have been a longer trip (these weekend trips are exhausting) but we had a wonderful time full of wonderful experiences! Disney is so much fun! Disney at Christmas is just beautiful! To top it off, Edwin, our "Elf on the Shelf" followed us to Disney - this really made the girl's day, to wake up and find him there!



We returned from Disney on December 23rd so that we could be prepared for a special event the next day. At Riverland Hills Baptist, each year,

there is a children's Christmas Eve service that is put on by the sixth graders. This year was Piper's year and my little angel played the part of one as the group told the story of Jesus' birth. A great treat waited for us all outside - a live camel, donkey, sheep, and goat! All the children were fascinated - especially when the camel took someone's Mountain Dew and chugged it all down! Then, we hurried home to bed - didn't want Santa to catch us awake!



Christmas was spent with family, loving each minute of the excitement of Santa and the celebration of the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, without whom, we'd have no hope and no holiday. Happy birthday, Lord!



Just after Christmas, the Cherry cousin's got together to have some fun and laughter over in Columbia. It was so much fun for them all to laugh and share their adventures over a delicious lunch!

Santa - what were you thinking?!? The girls, on one of our trips, had seen a giant candy bar at a



gas station and begged for it. I was sure it was too much, but Santa disagreed. The girls each got a giant taste of chocolate - Piper's "Reese" and Amber's "Hershey's." I don't think they made it through the whole thing, but it was fun to try!

At the end of December, Jen Wells and family decided to trust Piper with their 3 month old baby while they went to a movie! So, Piper and I went over and Jen showed Piper how to change diapers and where the bottles were kept. Jason, however, did not train Piper properly - he was just too good! The worst thing this child did to her was pull her hair (remember those days, moms?) - not even a dirty diaper! So, though I stayed with her, she didn't need me and LOVED playing with Jason. The first half hour, he was asleep. It was so difficult to keep her from waking him up! She wanted to play with him. Jason soon woke up on his own and she did get a couple of hours of playing time in with him.



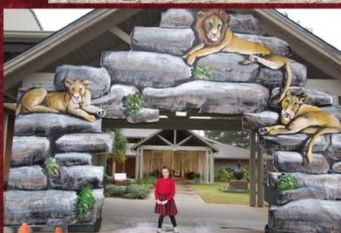
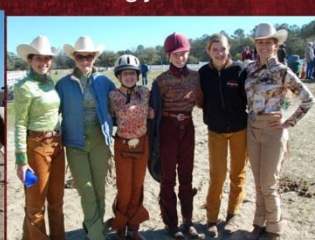


January brought a return to school, but also the exciting 100th day of school - each year, the lower school makes this special by doing many things that go up to 100... bringing 100 pencils or paperclips to count, or, as the 3rd grade knows - taking 100 circles around the track! Physical fitness is important to Hammond!



January also marked a special birthday - our beloved Tango turned six. I can't believe he's already six years old - he's such a sweet boy! Now, as we are approaching Christmas again, he is about to turn seven. Time really flies when you begin to look at it like this.

This year, Paige spent her birthday at Piper's last IEA show of the season, which was set for Charleston in February. It was a beautiful day! Piper started out nervous - she really wanted to make it to Zone finals, and needed 7 points. I told her it was just another show and to relax and have fun and do her best. Piper had to achieve first place to make it, and she had yet to accomplish that goal. Well, she decided she was happy with the way she'd ridden this season and relaxed - and got FIRST PLACE! She made it to Zone finals, coming in April, and was so excited! Her eyes were just dancing! We are so happy for her! The entire Hammond team had a wonderful IEA season and most of the team advanced to Zones - either as a team (both high school and middle school) and/or as individual riders. I won't go into how the scoring works (team and individual) as it's really complicated and I'm just beginning to understand it all, but we were SO PROUD of her! It's quite an accomplishment, her first year. Her teammate Claire, also in her first year, will join her at Zones in April. These two have really done an amazing job this season.

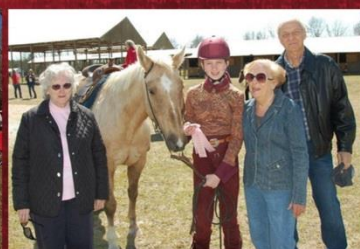


This year, Hammond's annual Country of Study day brought a wonderful view of life in Tanzania. The children learn so much on this day. Things about Tanzania are taught throughout the year and beautiful artwork is created to help cement the learning. Then, annually in February, there is one day in which the children are immersed in the country - eating Tanzanian food, learning Tanzanian dance and music, and hearing stories from the faculty members who spent two weeks of their summer there. It's a wonderful way to learn!



Later in the month, the kids celebrated Dr. Seuss' birthday by dressing up as their favorite fictional character. Amber chose to be a pirate!

One Saturday in March, we decided we'd get some exercise and clear out the woods in our back yard. It was quite an adventure and we had a HUGE pile of branches, small trees we removed, and other yard debris when it was all over. Kim and Daddy came to help Lee and I get them all cut and cleared. The day was not quite long enough to complete the task, but we got over 3/4 of the yard taken care of and all the prickly vines and bushes removed. Whew! Were we tired!



In addition to participating in IEA, the Hammond Equestrian team also participates in SCISA - so March brought a beautiful day of watching both Hammond equestrian teams compete - it was so much fun to be with the Hunt Seat side of the team. Western competed first, and here, the middle schoolers compete against the high schoolers. The competition was fierce, but Piper got a 5th place ribbon and was pleased - she was more excited that all her grandparents joined us at the Sumter arena to share her day! Hammond did extremely well - becoming state champions in equestrian, both the Western and Hunt Seat teams. It's really a fun and relaxing way to spend the day - outside, with friends and family, watching these amazing young people ride.

AWANA folks try to make it so fun for the kids - one example of this was "3-night." What would that be, you ask? Well, the kids had to wear as many things in three's as possible! Amber really got into it. Piper also wore a few things in three's - got to get into the spirit!





Amber and Piper have both worked very hard and, in March, earned their red belts in karate. They are working toward red/black and they will start training for their black belts this summer - it is amazing how far they've come. Of course, at East West Karate, all students are in training for their black belts, whatever level they have attained. However, to learn all the different things they have to learn, I'm glad the girls will have the summer!



Piper's year of cotillion lessons ended with a fun Spring Ball. She looked so beautiful and grown up in her blue cocktail dress and had a fun time dancing, eating, and talking with friends. We've enjoyed cotillion this year - thank you to Jan Cohn for all the hard work and dedication to these young people. It's so important to learn the proper manners and how to treat others.

Amber had a very special service at church just before Easter - the "Tale of Three Trees." The first-sixth grade choirs told the story of Jesus' life through the dreams of three trees. It was a touching and very well done service. Amber loves church so much!



This year, Elaina and Piper's spring breaks lined up. Unfortunately, my spring break and Kimberly's spring break (Elaina's mom) did not. However, the girls were able to get together for a Friday-Monday fun weekend! They've been best friends since age 3. It's hard to believe how grown up these girls are becoming! Our babies are turning into young ladies. Elaina got to see Amber's Three Trees performance during her visit - Amber LOVES 'laina! She's just a part of the family!

Easter brought a beautiful day of family, friends, and egg hunts! We started the day off by seeing the goodies brought by the Easter bunny and then attended Easter services at Riverland Hills. Nana and Granddaddy joined us for church and we took a photo with the cross, which the people of the church always decorate with cut flowers on Easter Sunday. Then, back to the house for dinner with Grandma, Aunt Nell, and Kim. Later that afternoon, we were joined by the Schellings and some neighbors for some ice cream, strawberries, cake, and an Easter egg hunt. Snowball decided to



make it more fun by "helping" find the eggs - as Piper and Kim would hide them, he'd grab and run for it! He had to be brought back into the house so the eggs could be properly hidden. (Little rascal!)



The first weekend of April brought IEA Zone finals. Western teams from six states gathered at Chateau Elan in Braselton, Georgia to compete to go to national competition. There were 15 kids in Piper's class - the largest of the day - and only the top two were to advance. Once again, I told Piper we were proud of her and to have fun and do her best. She was just so happy to be there. Because of safety and the size of the class, it was split into two groups. Piper rode in the first eight; then watched the next seven. Nine were recalled, and Piper was one of them! She was so excited! After the nine rode again, there was a very long, nervous wait time. Then, the top two were announced - and Piper got second place! She made it to nationals in her first year! Her team was so excited and just hugged and hugged her! All the riders did an excellent job - our high school team winning overall and advancing to nationals and four of the seven kids from Hammond advancing as individual riders (like Piper). So, we'll be heading to Oklahoma City in June - what a wonderful and amazing surprise! However, what I like best about this sport is that, no matter the team, everyone is supportive of everyone else. Safety is key, and while of course everyone wants to win and advance, they are all happy for those that do,



even if they do not. It's the way sports are supposed to be - full of responsible conduct, respect for their fellow competitors, and care for these beautiful animals. I'm so glad that both of my girls love to ride and feel privileged that they have made such wonderful friends and have such good older kids as role models. Joy McMillion is an



excellent coach and makes sure that our kids know what's truly important - to do your best, to be proud of what you accomplish, to learn from your mistakes, and to love and support your team and your competitors. Thank you, everyone, for the friendship.



The week before Amber's 9th birthday brought a very sad day. Mrs. Joy found a new home for Alex, Amber's favorite pony. Alex has held a soft spot in all our hearts, but it was time for him to move to a forever home. Amber was very sad, but understood. Her last lesson with Alex, she wore her Western show clothes so that it would be extra special. He has helped her to learn so very much. We will miss you, Alex, and hope you are happy in your new island home.



The Saturday before Amber's birthday, we met our friends Mills and Lindsey for a fun afternoon at Riverbanks Zoo. It's been awhile since we've visited and some things have changed and others are the same. The favorite event of the day was to feed the lorikeets. Piper has a special way with these little birds, and was able to get several to land on her arm for a feeding. Since this was in the afternoon after the birds had eaten all day, this was quite a difficult feat. After helping birds get on Amber, Lindsey, and Mills, Piper also helped other children have the fun adventure of hand-feeding the birds. Her "Dee" (my granddaddy) would be so proud of her. His love of birds has been passed on! Amber and her friends had a great time at the zoo and then we headed back to the house. We'd planned on going to a movie, too, but the kids were tired, so we stayed in, had dinner and cake, and the kids retired to "purple place" to play and sleep. It was a really fun day! Then, the next weekend, Mariclaire spent the night with Amber and her Nana, Granddaddy, Aunt Nell, and Kim came over to help celebrate. This meant Amber got two cakes - she was thrilled!



Alex was such a special and loved little fellow that Mrs. Joy gave him a "Going Away" party, the day before he was to leave. There were a number of kids there - those that used to ride him and those that currently did. The Pound's made a cute "Alex" cake and there was some "horsing around" by some of the older kids (like trying to mount bareback - first Mrs. Joy's barrel and then Alex himself!) and some tears from the younger ones. Alex was happy to see everyone and enjoyed the special treatment. He especially liked the giant plate of apples and carrots that each child shared with him. Good-bye, Alex. We will always love you.



Well, on April 16th, 2004, God blessed Lee and I with a beautiful, talented, smart, happy, loving, Christian child. Miss Amber Cherry Meeker was born at 11:17 in the morning and has grown into a beautiful young lady. I can't believe she's nine years old! She went off to school with a birthday snack (doughnuts) in hand! What happened to my baby?

On April 19th, PC formally welcomed our 17th president - Dr. Caude Lilly. The preceding evening brought a banquet and a kind "roasting" of Dr. Lilly, where everyone agreed that his highest accomplishment was convincing Fran to marry him! The Inauguration ceremony the next day was very nice. It was also nice to see Dr. Griffith, who returned to visit with friends and say a prayer to introduce the ceremony. Dr. Lilly, we welcomed you last July - now, it's official.



Hammond's third graders taught us all about South Carolina history in this year's wonderful play. They have changed it quite a bit from three years ago, with the kids starting out in the SC History Museum and making their way through our history as actor after actor came forward to describe current events. It was wonderful and Amber played her part of "Southern Belle" wonderfully! How could she not? She IS a South Carolina Southern Belle!



The end of April marked the end of AWANA for the school year - with the annual awards ceremony. I'm so proud of my AWANA family. Lee helps with the games and audio-visual and the girls love learning all the Bible verses and playing the games, making the crafts, etc. AWANA at our church stops at sixth grade, but they were talking about extending it to seventh - we'll see if they do. Piper earned a scholarship this year, to certain Christian colleges, for completing her AWANA work. Amber's well on her way to doing that - it's wonderful that both girls love church and God so much. I hope that never changes.



It wouldn't be the start of May without Hammond's Lower School Fun Day! I've now been in attendance for eight years! Amber's team did wonderfully and everyone had a great time with the egg races, water games, and jumping in potato sacks! The obstacle course and relay races are also always fun. We had a great time, signed shirts, and then headed home for the day.



The folks at Hammond decided to do an end of the year special feature - a version of Disney's "Lion King" - this tied in their country of study and students from 3rd-12th grade. The third grade art projects of the masks were amazing and the fourth graders sang beautifully with the middle and high school students. The 5th and 6th grade students were the meerkats in the production - and the costumes were wonderfully simple! It was an amazing production!





In preparation for Nationals, and because it's just a good thing to do, Piper attended a day long equestrian clinic sponsored by USC. Riding under the watchful eye of Coach Sorrel was a great experience and Piper learned a great deal. We're so thankful that the professionals in the field will take time to spend with the younger generation - they really appreciate it and learn so much!

The children's choir at Riverland Hills always does a wonderful job - each year in the Spring, the parents get to come and hear their little ones sing to the Lord. It's always such a joyful sound!



As a mother's day treat, Lee and the girls took me to Disney - we had so much fun! This time, we stayed in the Art of Animation resort, in the Little Mermaid rooms. The decorations were SO CUTE! Disney really went all out there. They even have the voices of Nemo, Dory, and Marlin under the water in the pool, so as you are swimming, you can hear them. It's so neat! While we were there, we got to enjoy the last of the annual Flower and Garden Festival in EPCOT and enjoyed a great safari adventure in Animal Kingdom, this time spotting the elusive Okapi! We learned about a behind the scenes wilderness trek, but didn't have time this short trip - something to look forward to next time. The Magic Kingdom was also magical - it was hard to say goodbye, as we knew we wouldn't get to come back for a while this time. We love Disney!



Hammond honored its spring and yearlong athletes with a very nice presentation of awards from the coaches with special recognition for team members. After this, our team joined the Pound's church event which was to raise money for those hungry and in need. Hunters in the area donate meat to those who have no food and this also raised money for the cause. We had a wonderful time and some interesting dishes, according to Amber. (No way did she try the frog legs! Piper did, though. She's more adventurous with food!) Then, we had a team meeting where Mrs. Joy told everyone how proud she was of them and gave them their letters and pins from the school. What a wonderful group of kids.



The weekend after Disney, we celebrated Mother's Day with our moms and Kim had a special surprise for Aunt Nell. Her birthday was also in May, and Kim surprised her by having us all meet at the Mill Pond - a quaint exclusive restaurant in Boykin, SC. The scenery was beautiful and the food was delicious!



This year, throughout the school year, I led two computer clubs at Hammond - I was so proud of everything my clubbers learned! The lower school kids learned about terminology, programming, app development (for Android devices), play with robots, enjoy Pixar Easter eggs, and so much more. The middle schoolers learned all that and more, also learning to program their iPad to make apps. They're a great group of kids. Two of my 7th graders expressed sorrow that next year will be their last club year - we'll have to see what we can do about that!



My annual "end of school" class photos turned out great. Mrs. White helped me get the 6th grade (they're growing up!). The third graders met me under the reading tree for a sweet shot. I can't believe Amber will be starting fourth grade in the fall or that Piper is in seventh. Where does the time go?



We celebrated Lee's birthday a little early this year, as he had to get ready to leave for a business trip to Oregon. It was a quiet weekend of packing, but we did sneak in a short cook out with his favorite lemon merrange pie!



The sixth grade put fairy tales on trial this year, accusing Hansel and Gretel of vandalism and murder! Piper was the prosecuting attorney and each child made up their questions, answers, and costumes according to their characters. So much fun!



The school year just flew by, with the girls growing and learning so much. The last day of school is always a little hard, as they won't see their friends for a while, but this year was especially difficult, as Piper's friend, Ivy, was not returning next year and Amber's friends David and Lindsey were also finding a new school. The girls hate to see their friends leave.



May 30th marked a change in the girls karate regimine - they achieved their red-black belts (second level red). They are now training for their black belts! Hard to believe they are at this level of training! To receive their black belts, they must know twelve tiger forms, be able to do 500 push-ups, 500 sit-ups, 500 kicks, etc. They will be given two preliminary hour long tests and then a four hour black belt test when they are ready. Mr. Jerry has a goal of 8 months for the students in this class (both child and adult) to be ready to test. It's really amazing to watch.



As an equestrian team bonding experience, Joy had the kids meet at Riverbanks Zoo for the ropes course. Piper discovered she inherited my fear of heights (unfortunate timing, I know) but she rallied with the help of her team and completed the course! Everyone had a great time. A couple of the kids had other commitments, but this group had a blast. Amber and I toured the zoo after the team completed the course and met up with them later. She and I enjoyed seeing several of the animals and new art statues in the zoo while tasting "Dippin' Dots" (a bit of a rip off if you ask me, but Amber loves them!) and wandering about. What fun!



We went to pick up Piper's show clothes for Nationals from Jean's Custom Show Fashions, which is just outside of Mount Airy, NC. I've always wanted to go, as it is the town where Andy Griffith grew up and the town Mayberry is based on. It was really fun to see the house he grew up in and there's a '50's era patrol car that gives tours - we'll have to go back for that one! The only thing missing was Lee, who was working. But, that gives us an excuse to return. Snappy Lunch (mentioned on the show once and awhile) was where Andy Griffith ate as a child and Amber says their name is appropriate - they are "snappy" - our meals were out lickity split! They are famous for their pork chop sandwich and it was DELICIOUS! (and I don't usually choose pork chops). The hamburgers and hotdogs were good also. Mama and Daddy rode with us and we had a great day! Amber's favorite was "Opie's Candy Store!"



East West Karate/MMA/BJJ brought in 26 time world champion Lauren Kearney to work with and train the kids in an hour long clinic this past June. She was awesome to watch and great with kids and adults who came for the clinic. I'm so glad the girls got this amazing opportunity and thanks to Mr. Jerry for arranging it! I heard a rumor she may return in December, when she's back in SC for competition. We hope she can come back to train again!

