



Meeker Family Christmas Newsletter - 2015 Merry Christmas, Everyone!

As 2015 reaches its end, I must say that this has been a great year. We've been a part of new beginnings, renewal of friendships, an end of an era, world records, thousand year floods, fun travel, and national titles. We hope you enjoy reading about our year.

Last Christmas, we traveled to one of our favorite places to enjoy the lights of the holidays. We were joined by Aunt Nell, Kim, Mama, and Daddy as we made our way across Walt Disney

World and enjoyed the magic created by the season. Beautiful parades, wonderful food, amazing decorations, beautiful lights, and fun fireworks always help bring the Christmas season in with style. We got back home in time to enjoy Christmas at home with family. It's always so very nice to be with everyone.



Throughout the Spring, the girls continued to work hard at school and they both enjoyed week long trips with their class; Piper traveled to Washington D. C. where she got to tour our nation's capital. Amber's class headed to Williamsburg, VA and she and her classmates went back in time to learn about the colonial period. They had a great time! Piper arrived back in time to compete for her equestrian team at Zone finals, finishing first and progressing on to Nationals, so another Oklahoma trip was in our future for the Summer!





The Spring also brought a new challenge for both Lee and I; I wanted to lose some weight and he wanted to adapt to a more healthy lifestyle; by adding in exercise, weight training, and better diet choices, I lost two sizes this year! Lee joined a Bible study group at church called "Run for God." After Bible study and training, he ran his first 5K in 33 minutes - we were so proud of him! The group took a break for the summer, but came back in the fall, where Lee improved on his time by running this 5K in 28 minutes and coming in second place for his age group. We are all so proud of him!



We also enjoyed getting family together in the Spring. Easter always

provides us with a fun time together, celebrating the Lord's resurrection with a beautiful cross of flowers at church followed by a meal together at the house and an egg hunt that has morphed into a mix of egg hunt / capture the flag as the girls and their friends have gotten older. May brings Mother's Day, and three birthdays - Madi, Nell, and Lee! Getting everyone to sit still for a picture is hard - esp. with a puppy! Oreo also turned 1 this



June and celebrated with Tango, Snowball, and a birthday hamburger!



As the school year came to a close last May, we celebrated Piper's last year of middle school as she took part in the "Stepping Up" ceremony, where she stepped up to ninth grade with her class. As a part of the ceremony, the eighth grade teachers described each student with a six word sentence; Piper's was "Quiet waters that run very deep." It's so hard to believe she is now a freshman in high school! And, as expected, when her birthday hit, she went to the DMV and got her learner's permit. Watch out, world - she's driving now!



After graduating the 5th grade with honors for the year, Amber decided that she wanted to return to East West and work toward her second

degree black belt. She had wanted to do this last year, but her struggles with her back and the scoliosis diagnosis kept us from this; so she decided that Summer 2015 was the time! We look forward to seeing great things! She also rescued a baby bird that fell from its nest while she was helping Lee and I with some yard work. Meanwhile, both girls continued to train for their riding, as Amber was looking forward to joining the team in the fall.





Piper's training took her down to GA a couple of times to Coach Deborah Wright. The path happens to travel right by the home of my best friend Jennifer Vaughan! While Jen and I have spent many hours on the phone over the years, it has sadly become rare that we get to actually see each other. It was so



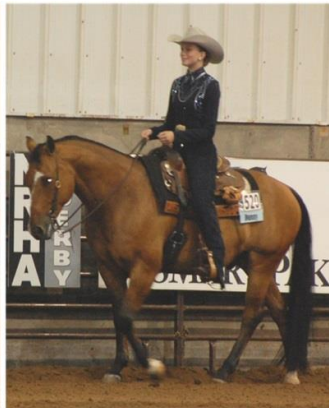
wonderful to get to spend time eating together, talking, and acting like college students again. No matter how much time we spend apart, we can always pick things right back up.



This year, Father's Day was spent traveling out to Oklahoma with our oldest as she was to compete for the National equestrian title in her class. Our trip to Oklahoma this Summer was a family affair; Mama and Daddy made the trip to Oklahoma City for the third time, and we were joined by Aunt Nell and Kim this year. We had fun at several stops, including two state parks in GA, the Bush library in TX, many of the Oklahoma City sites like the Cowboy and Western Museum and the Memorial, and a stop at the Old Mill on the way back. Also, this time as we passed through Tennessee, we had to stop at Elvis' birthplace! It was really cool learning about his early years.



As we traveled, we received a special treat! We stopped to see another good friend, Elizabeth Lotufo. Liz and I were roommates one Summer in college, doing research in Ohio and we've kept in touch ever since; unfortunately, life's circumstances didn't allow us to get together except through wonderful letters and cards, but again, I've been so very lucky to have such a wonderful friend. Last year, she moved to Vicksburg, which is along the I-20 route to Oklahoma City! In the last couple of years, Liz and her husband Gui have been blessed with three beautiful children. Cyrus was about two years old when the twins came this past spring. We were so very excited to get to meet them all! Such precious children!



When we got to the show arena for Nationals, we saw that Piper's class was the last one of the day. It was a long day of nervous anticipation, where we cheered on friends Ellersley, Claire, and Hannah Jane while we waited for Piper's turn to come. She drew a beautiful gelding named "Dunny" and went out to compete with the other 11

national finalists. At the end of the day, Piper was named Reserve Champion, coming in second nationally in her class! We are so very proud of her. Dunny was for sale and she tried to tempt us, but we told her we couldn't do that. Little did we know that a new 1000lb 'baby' was indeed in our future...





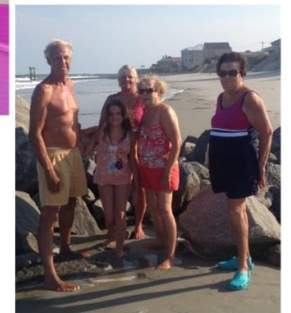
Meanwhile, Amber had always wanted a pool party for her birthday; however, with an April birthday, this was nearly impossible to pull off. It was always either too cold or too stormy. So, our brilliant negotiator asked if we could postpone her birthday for a month and have the party in May, before school was out. We agreed with this; then, she surprised us further. She said she didn't really need any presents. Through the wonderful influence of Riverland Hills Baptist and Hammond, she has seen how groups can get together to help someone or something in need, so that's what she decided to do. She asked that all her friends bring either a gift or donation for the Retired Thoroughbred Foundation. This wonderful

organization rescues these beautiful animals from slaughter and uses them to rehabilitate prisoners until a suitable home can be found for them. Amber gathered up the checks and cash, along with a wheelbarrow, buckets, scrapers, and sponges and we arranged to drop off these treasures with the Foundation. They were so touched that an 11 year old would do that, that they called in the local media: Amber was in the Sumter Daily Item along with Gator, one of the thoroughbreds. She was also interviewed at McMillion Farm (along with Coosa and Mrs. Joy) by WIS-TV 10 news (a local NBC station) in their "Good News" segment. She asked to keep Gator - apparently, they give the horses to good homes. However, the true cost of a horse is not necessarily in the purchase price but the monthly care, so we had to leave Gator there for someone else. He was very sweet, though. She said she hopes to do this again in the future.

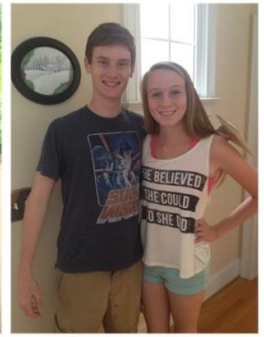
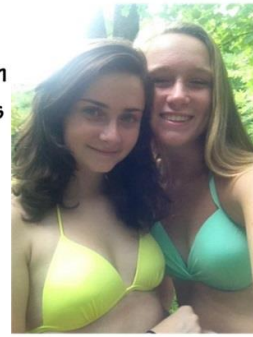


Amber was so appreciative, humble, and thankful for her friends for helping her help these horses.

When we returned from Nationals, the girls hit the beach with Mama, Daddy, Aunt Nell, and Kim and Lee and I had some time to ourselves. It was strange not having our little chatterboxes around, but they had a great time at the beach and we visited for a couple of days. They also got to see the golden tabby tigers and chimps at Barefoot Landing!



Piper came home for about a day and then headed to NC to stay with her best friend Elaina for a week - both of them were getting ready to start high school. They've been best friends since they were three years old - where has the time gone? Elaina had successfully made her school's cheer leading squad! Meanwhile, her brother Lochlan has become an official USC Gamecock and started his freshman year this past fall. We've already gotten to enjoy seeing the Angle's a couple of times as they've been in Columbia - Piper is thrilled to get to see Elaina more often now.



Also, in August, we had to say goodbye to Pepper. She was so very sweet, but just not a good match for Piper's growing skill level. Piper was thrilled to hear that Pepper was sold to a lady about an hour away who has said she is welcome to visit or ride her whenever she likes. One other sad event was to say goodbye to Penny. Penny was older and in poor health; she was the first horse either of the girls ever rode and she was a well-loved horse for many, many beginning riders. She passed away this past fall, after retiring a few months before.



However, God had placed a wonderful little gelding in Piper's path: "Maintain the Luck," aka "Duke" was in need of a good home and a sweet young lady to love him. He's also a very well trained little reiner.



So, Piper worked out a deal with Mrs. Joy to "co-own" Duke - she (with Lee and I's help) went in with Mrs. Joy to purchase Duke and they will own him together until Piper can buy her out. (So, if you need a baby sitter, she's eager to make some money!) He's a wonderful and friendly little fellow with a powerful motor. He's also very eager to please and he and Coosa get along wonderfully. So we are now no longer leasing - we officially own 2 horses. How did THAT happen? We celebrated with everyone, meeting at the barn and getting a great family photo.



We got ready to begin the school year with a bang. Piper's class was scheduled for their annual trip within a week of classes beginning - they were to kayak down the Nantahala River together as a class! These trips are normally both educational and fun, and this one was no exception. Since many new students join Hammond in the ninth grade, this trip also serves the purpose of allowing them all to get to know one another.



Piper had a blast - I think it was the first trip she liked better than the one to Earthshine in fourth grade (though all of them have been fun). Her words when she got off the bus: "It was amazing! It was terrifying! I thought I was going to die! I can't wait to do it again!"



By starting the 6th grade this year, Amber could officially join the school's Western Equestrian Team. This has been her goal for the last six years, so she was very excited! This year, the IEA Hunt Seat and Western finals are to be held together, in April instead of in June, in Kentucky instead of Oklahoma. This doesn't change much for the hunt seat side (this is their normal calendar) but sure does compress things on the Western side. So, our normal November show was held in October this year, and with it came Amber's first team competition. She was a bit nervous, but she shouldn't have been - she left the show with a first and a fourth place ribbon and 10 of her necessary 15 points to ride at Zone finals. Piper came away with two blue ribbons (14 points) and both the high school and middle school teams left with 14 of the 20 team points needed; this year, Piper's on the high school team for the first time with teammates Claire, Megan, and new friend

Lauren. Amber and Olivia round out the Hammond team for the middle school and also ride on the barn team IIR Stars with Mrs. Joy and many friends, including Hannah Jane, Jerica, Jada, Summer, Sheldon, Isabella, Sarah, and Adrianna. Having a larger team to ride with is so much fun! The teams have had a couple of clinics to prepare for the season and all the kids seem to get along very well. We were also proud of Duke, who received the "Best Horse in the Show" award, winning a pretty red halter for himself. At this writing, Piper has shown once more and has her points to move forward to Zones. Amber was sick during that show, so her next opportunity will be after Christmas. She's determined to make it!



This fall, our family was a part of a fun event: we may have helped Hammond set a Guinness Book of World Record! This is Hammond's 50th year, and as a part of the celebration, all the students, teachers, staff, and parents were asked to come to the football field one Friday afternoon, wearing red, to see how many of us could fit inside the letter "H." We needed (at the time) about 1000 for the record and while we are still awaiting the official "you got it" we had over 1200 people present in that big "H" that very hot afternoon! It was a lot of fun.



PRAY FOR SC

However, not long after that, SC was a part of another record event that was not so good. It started to rain. And rain. And then it rained some more. For days and days on end, it poured rain. While warned by local weathermen this was really serious, I don't know that anyone was prepared for what Columbia, SC went through in what is now known as the "Thousand Year Flood." That Sunday morning, friends of ours were being rescued by boat from their homes as dam after dam broke across our city. Businesses were wiped out, people and cars swept away by the flood waters, and the dam near our home was pouring out water from the flood gates - more than it had ever done. We were lucky, but many friends were not, losing vehicles, the first floors of their homes, or everything they had. It was horrifying and frightening, and it showed the power of social media, as friends and family located loved ones through Facebook and Instagram and got help to others in need via the same sources. It will be months for some, years for others, before "normal" will return. Please continue to pray for SC.

Once we were able to get out, Piper went to her school (which was closed) to help take care of the area's children. Hammond opened their doors to the residents in the area for any child age 4-12; unaffected faculty and high school students watched them while their parents sorted through water soaked belongings and started dealing with insurance companies and FEMA. Our church opened its doors to feed more than 50,000 people and workers, while distributing water like crazy. Meanwhile, Hammond's high school football team made national news by going out into the community and helping rip out water damaged areas of homes and move furniture out into the sun to try to save what could be saved. National news anchors were on the streets downtown. It was crazy, frightening, and hopefully something that will not repeat for another thousand or more years. We were so proud of our church and school, who quickly jumped in to help, as well as our community at large, where strangers helped strangers and God's grace was seen all over the city.



The flood caused the cancelation (really just moved to May) of Amber's annual class trip - this one to Alabama for Space Camp. She was disappointed, but the roads just could not be traveled. It was so crazy and unbelievable. Sinkholes everywhere, bridges washed away, dams gone - really not a time to be out and about. We did get to catch up with our friends the Schellings, however, as we traveled to Sapphire, NC to see the leaves one weekend. It was so nice to get away and relax by a camp fire, roast marshmallows, and enjoy the peaceful

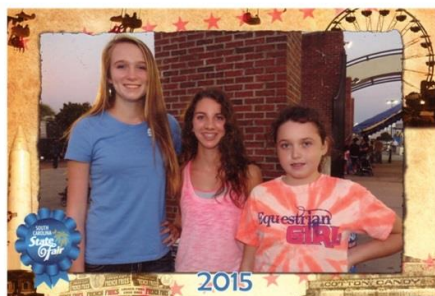
surroundings at the cabin. We didn't hike as much this year (it was raining!) but getting in the one good camp fire with fun ghost stories and lots of smoores helped make up for this. We're so grateful to have them as a part of our lives and honored to help celebrate their 20th wedding anniversary with a renewal of their vows. It was very touching.



This fall, Amber started to take part in Cotillion, which means lots of pretty dresses, parties, and dances. She's enjoyed it so far and has won two prizes already! She especially loves the dresses and shoes (she's always been such a shoe girl) and had a great time at the December Holly Ball, a semi-formal dance. It's so hard to believe she's really a young lady now.



Throughout the year, we've also had fun times with friends; hit the State Fair; and Piper attended her first Fall retreat with the church group. We've enjoyed the marriages of Lindsey and Stephen as well as Emily and Garth (Emily was our flower girl - we are officially old!). Thanksgiving brought us all together again for a nice meal and a relaxing day. We've certainly been keeping busy! We wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!



*Merry Christmas!
Love,
Lee, Paige, Piper,
Amber,
Tango, Snowball, Oreo,
Coosa, and Duke*

