

Meeker Family Christmas Newsletter 2016

Dear Family and Friends,

Well, the time has come for another annual "Meeker Christmas Newsletter." We hope you all are well. We've had lots of firsts this year, from a first job to a first broken bone; we've had some worries as well, as companies close sites. We've had ups and downs and loves and losses. We hope you enjoy us sharing our year with you.



This year, Lee had some amazing accomplishments! He has continued to participate in "Run for God" at Riverland Hills Baptist and has now completed four 5K runs successfully, improving his time with each run. He has also completed his first 8K and is trying to get me to join him. I may just squeeze some time in this spring, though I will probably "Walk for God" instead of run.

Lee also became an ordained deacon in our church. It is such an honor and privilege and we (as a family) are so proud of him and humbled by the opportunity to help him serve in this way. The Deacon Ordination was such a wonderful and touching

experience, with ordained deacons laying hands on Lee and I to pray for him, to pray for me, to pray for us, and to pray for our church. We also loved seeing family who were able to attend. Aunt Jeanette and Aunt Rachel, coming from PA, were especially nice for Lee!



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Lee continued working with AWANAs this year at church, though both Piper and Amber are now too old to participate (we shed a tear there). He loves working with the kids and is one of the deacons assigned to the children of our church. He also works with the media team once or twice each month to help video the traditional service of our church. This video and audio are then put online so that everyone can hear it again or for the first time if they were unable to come that week. He's been very busy!



Unfortunately, one event has been very difficult for us; Intel, where Lee has worked for the last almost 17 years, is closing the Columbia site. We were offered a transfer to the Austin, TX location and we prayed quite a bit for guidance. Lee and I went to Austin to see the area, tour the Intel facility there, and look at housing/schools/costs, etc. After quite a bit of talking, we both felt that God wanted us to stay in Columbia. So, when Intel closes its doors next year (2017) Lee will be looking for a new position elsewhere. Please keep our family in prayer as we work through this transition period in our lives. While we are sad to see many friends leave for Austin, we wish them the best and hope to visit in the future. We also feel excited about the new opportunities God has in store for our family.



Lee and I did have some fun for our 19th wedding anniversary; one of our favorite comedienne's, Jeanne Robertson, was coming to the Alabama Theater at Myrtle Beach and Lee surprised me with tickets. This was Jeanne's "Rocking Chair" tour, as she'd broken her leg earlier this year. We went to see Jeanne and got to meet Jerry, aka "Left Brain" (her husband), and grandson Ryder in person. If you've never heard her, it's good clean fun with an Andy Griffith twist. We had a great time.

Meanwhile, I received a promotion at work last year; I am now a full professor of computer science at Presbyterian College. I am also in my 5th year as chair of our department of Physics and Computer Science. We are a small department, yet service a large number of students on our campus. I was very pleased with the promotion; it couldn't have come at a better time.



In February, I worked as the program chair of our bi-annual regional conference for women in computing. Since 2010, I have played a large role in this conference, either as chair, co-chair, or program chair and each year we've had a wonderful group of women (and a few men) come to participate, learn, and network. This year, the conference was hosted in Myrtle Beach, SC and Lee was able to go with me. February was a little cooler than our usual beach trip, but it was nice to go for a beach walk before the Saturday morning talk. It's so gratifying to see this conference succeed.

I have also been trying to lose weight. Over the last couple of years, I tried many different things, but until my two "Angie's" I had very little success. Angie Sellers, of "Fit Columbia" got me started in my (eventually successful) weight loss journey with work, time, and exercise, along with recipes and diet tips that helped me start getting healthy. Her help to find exercises that I could do in 10-15 minutes per day as well as her support helped me loose about 25 lbs; however, at that point, I seemed to be "stuck" - haven't we all been there? And I gained 5-8 back! So, I started talking to my other Angie - Angella Straw, a health coach who helped me get in touch with a much healthier diet. No sugar (yes - I did it) and more protein and vegetables helped me loose even more, so that I'm down a little over 45 lbs since I started the journey and very close to my ultimate goal of losing 53lbs. I couldn't have done it without you!



This past year, we lost a wonderful lady in our family and the last of my grandfather's 12 brothers and sisters. Aunt Mary Smith, of Hartsville, was a great and strong lady who died at the age of 97; she joined Uncle Bruce and her brothers and sisters in heaven last January. I loved calling and talking to her - she had such wisdom and a way with words. I tried to talk to her three or four times each month and certainly miss our conversations. Aunt Mary was very special.



I was also very saddened to hear of the passing of a very dear lady. Mrs. Ethel Griffin, who sold me my first "big girl" dress as a teenager and who I worked alongside at Belk through my high school / college years. This past year, she went to go be with the Lord at the age of 109. She was such a sweet, special lady and the world is a much poorer place without her.

As many of you know, Amber had an amazing and tough year with lots of highs and one big low. Last December, she got to live a



fun "dream come true" with one of her friends, McKinney, who joined us on a trip to Walt Disney World. We splurged and stayed in the Beach Club resort for a few days and enjoyed all the Christmas lights and decorations we could. We love the life-sized



horses, the castle at night, and most of all, the Osbourne Family Spectacle of Lights, which was in its final year. New renovations to Hollywood Studios will mean that those lights won't be there this year; we do certainly hope that they will find a new place for them in WDW. They were my favorite part of the holiday decorations there. It was so much fun to have friends there, enjoy the rides, eat amazing food, and just have a lot of fun together. We ended our trip by eating the famous "Kitchen Sink" - it has everything in it and is served in a kitchen sink! Five types of ice cream, every topping in the house, and a whole jar of cherries (Amber's favorite)! Yum!

We made it home just in time for Amber to take part in the Children's Christmas Eve service at Riverland Hills. Our 6th graders play the nativity story for this wonderful tradition given to the children. Amber was, of course, my little angel - and also the angel to tell the shepherds that Jesus was born! Christmas itself was shared with family and we loved seeing everyone.



Amber made her points for IEA Zones last year and with anticipation and hope, went into a huge show pen (the class was split into two) to attempt to take one of the top two slots that would allow her to go forward to Nationals - her goal at the beginning of the year. After both classes showed, she was one of 9 called back to show again and as they started giving out ribbons, she held her breath: 6, 5, 4... then, with only 3 riders left in the show pen, number 3 was called - and it wasn't her.



She knew she had one of the Nationals slots and was so excited! She finished second in her class and progressed on to Nationals, representing herself and her team in Lexington, KY. This is a difficult sport, as she was simultaneously elated for herself and so sad for her friends that did not get to go. She showed well in Kentucky and we got to explore the famous horse park with friends and team mates. She was also "caught being good" by IEA folks twice, winning a backpack and a subscription to Equine journal! So proud of her spirit and her heart for others.



Amber went on to ride with Hammond at the SCISA state championships, where Hammond took first place, earning her first belt buckle. She placed second in her first ride as a "Future Novice," her new class, and she was so pumped, excited, and happy.



Also, through the year, Amber got to enjoy going to cotillion - learning all the rules of etiquette and even some dance moves. Their two annual balls, the Holly Ball and the Spring Ball, were big hits for her and she loved all the pretty dresses and shoes that attending the monthly events brought.

Toward the end of the school year, Amber got to enjoy her 6th grade trip; it had been postponed with the previous year's flood taking precedence, and all the Hammond 6th graders headed first to the Atlanta Aquarium and then on to Space Camp in Alabama. Amber had a blast!



Amber vowed that this past summer, slated to be the "best summer ever" she was going to work really hard to hone her riding skills while helping at church, going on pre-planned trips, and having



so much fun with her friends. Alas, all her plans came to a crashing halt one June afternoon when she was grooming her horse, Coosa, and he kicked out at a horse fly, hitting her in the leg, right at the growth plate in the knee. It moved the growth plate, fractured the femur, and left Amber in intense pain like she'd never known before. Piper, Cody, Mrs. Joy, and I were by her side quickly, Mrs. Joy wrapping the leg so tightly so that it wouldn't budge; Lee met me at Doctor's Care



in record time; surgery was 5 days later to set the leg and growth plate and for 9 weeks, Amber could put no weight on her leg AT ALL. Throughout the summer, she had 5 different braces on her leg (they don't cast that type of injury) - from the wrap and two initial orthopedic braces to one from her thigh to her ankle with no movement, to one which allowed 10-30 degrees of movement. With braces on her teeth and having to sleep in a back brace, Amber has confessed she's tired of collecting braces.





My normally active child was frustrated to be relegated to the bed, but her friends and family rallied around her; some coming and playing board games or watching movies, others playing online games with her, others sending sweets and treats. While she loved visits from her friends, visiting the zoo in her wheelchair, cleaning tack, eating at Dempsey's pizza, enjoying church, catching Pok-e-mon, visiting Coosa (had to let him know she was okay), and finding out that the adult with her wheelchair gets into the movies for free (so we found Dori several times...), she was frustrated that she missed visiting Pennsylvania for Aunt Jeanette's birthday celebration, helping with Vacation Bible School and Mrs. Joy's horse camp, attending an amazing horse clinic in NC, and part of the beach vacation, though she and I did get to go for part of my families trip at the end of the summer; Piper and Lee came up on the weekend of the trip (she was working hard this summer - see below) and Kim helped Amber start to put weight back on her leg and rebuild her strength in the condo's pool; she used crutches the rest of the time. She began walking without crutches about a week before school started back - so it was not really a fun summer for her. However, she feels that God has a plan and, for some reason, this was supposed to happen.



As soon as Dr. Piehl gave the "go ahead" she was back at the barn, and with Mrs. Joy's help, mounted Coosa for the first time since her accident. She knows she has a long way to go to rebuild the strength lost to atrophied muscles, but she was determined to ride for the team again this year and has been going to either physical therapy, conditioning, riding, or karate (she's back looking for her second-degree black belt with Mr. Jerry, too) - or some combination of two of those, every day since August while maintaining an excellent grade average. We ended the summer with a fun make over and Amber started off 7th grade strong, was recruited for the Duke TIPS program (so she'll be taking the SAT's in 7th grade!) and looks forward to a great year! She also had an amazing fall trip to Camp McCall with the youth group at church. She's catching up on all the fun and work she missed out on this summer, though she has also seen quite a few Hallmark movies now.





To help Amber (and save my sanity), we made a difficult decision to move our horses from Joy's barn, McMillion Farm, to Creekside Stables, which just happen to be located across the street from our home. Now that we've done it, I wonder why we didn't do it years ago, as the ability to ride every day without the 90-120-minute round trip to Hopkins has been such a blessing. However, we miss seeing our McMillion Farm barn family as often; we do still enjoy the lessons and clinics, as well as the shows that allow us to catch up with all our friends. Adrian

Mack, at Creekside has also introduced Amber and Piper to the world of Huntseat, and Coosa and Duke seem to like the use of an English saddle for half the time and a western saddle the other half of being ridden. The English saddle is a lot lighter than the traditional western tack. We really appreciate the warm welcome Adrian has given us and look forward to making more and more new friends there. Make new friends and keep the old, as one is silver and the other gold - right?



Meanwhile, Piper has had an amazing year of many firsts that come once-in-a-lifetime. She, too, made her points at Zones, coming in first in her class, and went on to compete at the Kentucky horse park. She placed third in her class



at Nationals - her first year of high school! Both girls were surrounded by their loving family and we were all so proud of them!



Piper later attended an amazing horse clinic. There, she and Duke learned from some of the best horse professionals in the country. The riders who attended were from up and down the east coast and traveled to Laurinburg, NC at the St. Andrews Equestrian Center to learn from the best: Sandra Vaughn, Ryan Cottingim, Debra Jones Wright, Carla Wennberg, and Keigh Miller. The kids spent three days soaking in the knowledge these amazing professionals agreed to share with

them. Piper went with her barn family and she had a great time and learned so much. A big thank you to the National Snaffle Bit Association for organizing this!

After finishing her freshman year of high school strongly, Piper began what she's labeled "the best summer of her life" (not counting the part where her sister got hurt). She got her first job with Chick-Fil-A and loved working in a loving, Christian environment. She loved the hours and the people and (of course) the paychecks. She also competed for a coveted spot in the "ZooTeen" program at Riverbanks Zoo. This highly competitive program draws teenagers from all over SC (with some coming from NC, GA, and TN) to compete for slots to learn what it's like to work at a large zoological park. Piper received one of the slots and for 6 weeks this summer was an intern at Riverbanks Zoo. The first year of the program, the teens work with the zoo camps for kids. Piper loves children, but found this challenging, as they can get into many things. She helped the kids learn all about animals at the zoo, from snapping turtles, boa constrictors, lorikeets, seals/sea lions, penguins, tigers, and many more. From crafts to behind the scenes adventures to touching small "safe" creatures, Piper had a blast; she also gained her restricted license and is driving on her own.



Her summer schedule is one most would avoid; she'd get up at 4:30am, leave the house by 5, get to the barn before 6, ride until 7, put away the horse(s) and head for breakfast on her way to the zoo, then work from 8-4 and return home; on other days, she would start (8-4) at the zoo then leave for Chick-Fil-A to work a 5-9 shift. Oh, to have the energy of a teenager who loves what they're doing.





With her busy summer schedule, Piper didn't get to go to the beach as much as usual; instead, she came for a weekend and I finally got the picture I've been trying to get since her first trip at 3 months old: a picture of Piper with her "namesake" - a flock of sandpipers on the beach.



Working so hard enabled her to pay off her horse, so Duke is all hers. She loves that little reiner! She took some lessons from our new co-coach, Dennis Pope, and had a great time in Georgia. She started reining for the team and with three shows behind her, has her points for advancing to Zones - she's excited to start her IEA reining off with such success.



September brought Piper's "Sweet 16" birthday party. She loved helping plan it - she wanted a dinner with music from her playlist; an interesting mix of pop, dance, country, and Christian praise music - all so Piper! We rented out the Ascot clubhouse and hosted a nice party with a mix of teens from all parts of her life; long time "like-family"

friends, Hammond school friends, barn friends, church friends, Zoo Teen friends, working friends, and even a boyfriend - Levi. Lee and I felt so honored and happy that Piper has chosen such a wonderful group of friends. All of them were well mannered, enjoyed the food and the photo booth, and were very polite, with a few being able to stay and help clean up.



Piper had spent all of her savings on her horse, Duke, so Lee and I decided to do what we had said we would not and give her a vehicle for her 16th birthday. With the help of Aaron Turnage of Turnage Motor Co., Piper's dreams came true with a big red Toyota Tundra truck on the eve of her birthday. It was so much fun to surprise her (with the caveat that this was a birthday and Christmas and every other holiday for a while gift). We've added the towing package so that one day she can haul her "baby" to shows. We just need the bumper sticker "Silly boys, trucks are for girls!" that we saw the other day... This helps Lee and I tremendously, as she is now mobile and independent of requiring us to take her everywhere; but now we have new worries of a teenager driving through malfunction junction every day and navigating through traffic with a lot of irresponsible drivers.



It's so hard to believe our baby girl is now a beautiful, independent young lady. She's driving herself and Amber to school, to lessons, and helping Lee and I if we need it. She's hit the ground running her sophomore year, doing very well in school and with her team riding. She works hard at church, becoming a "Youth Leader" on the leadership council for youth at RHBC and continuing to work at CFA on the weekends, with one weekend/month reserved for Riverbanks Zoo. It's a busy life, but she loves it.

As we didn't really get a family vacation this year, we snuck away for a



weekend to the "Night of Joy" concert, held at the Wide World of Sports complex at Walt Disney World. We stayed on property but didn't go into the parks; instead, we enjoyed the hotel's amenities and then headed over to the concert. It was amazing - the Christian artists were wonderful and we couldn't describe the love and excitement we felt in the crowd. We hope to return next year to hear these and other artists again. Hearing Francesca Battistelli, Chris Tomlin, Casting Crowns, Matthew West, Crowder, Stars Go Dim, and Zealand Worship in person (with others there that we missed) was just amazing. Hearing the story behind beloved songs and their own personal witness was inspiring. I would encourage everyone to take the trip next year!



On the day we arrived, we decided to visit DisneyQuest one more time, as Disney is planning to close it. It is getting bare inside, but they still had the old favorites. Lee and I, as children of the 80's and as computer scientists decided to leave our own marks there - I set the high score on Mrs. PacMan (after 3 hours of non-stop play!) of 704,560 points! Lee set the high score for Galaga, Asteroids and Moon Patrol.



The girls couldn't believe we spent that much time doing that; they enjoyed the cyber games, creating their own roller coasters and riding the simulators, virtual Pirates of the Caribbean, Aladdin's Magic Carpet, and Buzz Lightyear's Spin. I can't believe they're closing it!



We also took a weekend to spend in the mountains of NC with our friends the Schellings. We hope this is not the last time our families go there together; we've been doing it since Amber and David were about three years old; however, Todd has decided to take Intel up on their offer to move to Austin, so in June our dear friends will be leaving the area. This year, our mountain getaway included Piper's best friend Elaina again, as she's become a wonderful part of that trip, and Fede, an Italian exchange student staying with the Schellings. So poor David was the only boy on the trip (other than Lee and Todd). We loved hiking up through Highlands and enjoying the view of the town. Carrie and I also



waited to see the "Shadow of the Bear" a location near Cashiers where, at certain points of the year as the sun sets, the shadow of the mountain gives you the silhouette of a bear. We enjoyed a fun campfire filled with s'mores, ghost stories, and roasted marshmallows followed by a delicious





breakfast the next morning. Hopefully we can lure them back from TX to join us for future NC mountain adventures. We also hope to visit them in TX in the future.

While some of our friends are leaving the state, others are arriving. My best friend, Jennifer, from Furman has relocated to Charleston, SC, taking a position at Ashley Hall. It was great to see her and get to show her our house, introduce her to Tango, Snowball, and Oreo, as well as Coosa and Duke from a small distance. We look forward to seeing her more often than we have in the past.



Through the year we were blessed to share holidays with family and friends; Christmas, Easter, and July 4th. Thanksgiving was shared in our home, surrounded by family. We wish you all a Very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!



Love,



*Lee, Paige, Piper,
Amber, Tango, Snowball,
Oreo, Coosa, and Duke*



You can also enjoy our letter and photos online at <https://meekerchristmasite.shutterfly.com/>
Password: meekerchristmas

