



2017 Meeker Family Christmas Newsletter



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We wish you all a very Merry Christmas 2017 from the Meeker Family! We hope you've had a great year. As always, the year was full of ups and downs for us; my mother had a pacemaker installed, Lee's mom dislocated her shoulder during the year, Piper was in her first fender bender (she was rear-ended on I-26), and I had a severe celery reaction (told y'all I was allergic) and even found myself in the ER with chest pain. Lee's work with Intel, after nearly 18 years, is coming to a close at the end of December, as the company decided to close the Columbia site and we decided to remain in SC and not relocate to Austin, TX. While these difficulties are a part of life, we had so many blessings during the year that it far overreaches them.



As you may recall, summer 2016, Amber was kicked by her horse and her leg broken. This led to a rocky start to her competitive season, as her leg had not regained its former strength. Having just 5 shows to make her points to move forward, she'd zeroed in her first two. However, she redoubled her work efforts and at the next three shows, she made her points! We are so proud of



her. She worked hard to get to Zone finals. At the December show, she also was granted the sportsmanship award. I would rather my girls get this than any other award given. Piper also did well - we left cold and happy.

From that really cold December show, we drove straight through to our annual Walt Disney World Christmas visit. It was not the same without the Osbourne lights, but beautiful and fun never-the-less. It was not easy to pack for a below freezing horse show to temperatures in the high seventies, but we did it. Disney is so beautiful at Christmas.



We returned home in time to celebrate Jesus' birthday with our family, bringing our annual yearly traditions back full circle. We celebrate the birth of Christ Jesus our Savior with family and friends. We love seeing everyone and visiting, catching up, laughing, sharing, and having fun.





On December 6th, unfortunately, my good friend Jennifer lost her father. David Vaughan was a wonderful, loving father who loved his children, the law, and movies. He was always so generous and caring toward others and enjoyed retired life on the lake near Atlanta with his wife. He had some health issues that he'd been fighting and eventually lost the battle.

The funeral was held until January, for family reasons. That weekend was snowy; the peaceful cover of white seemed very poignant and touching. He will certainly be missed by all who knew him.

After Christmas, we went to visit the Pops at Flamekissed Farm and after an awesome reining lesson, the girls got to meet their longhorn steer up close and personal - "Moo" seems to love



marshmallows! It's quite an unusual treat to see your children feeding marshmallows to a long horn steer. It's also pretty amazing how sensitive the horns are - Joy tells me that Moo can navigate fences, trees, and bushes wonderfully, never getting the horns caught up on anything, but moving right on through with the rest of the cows.

They also tried their hand at riding a cow - "Burly" the cow will allow kids to get on her back, so of course we had to give it a try. Maegan was there for a lesson, too, so she joined in - it's always an adventure at the Pope's farm!



January always brings new resolutions and with them, came my desire to exercise more with others. I decided to join Lee at Run For God last spring session and had a great time. We got started in January and ran our race (I walked) in April. About midway, we paused to have a practice where we ran for Wyatt - a toddler, whose grandmother was a friend of the group. Unfortunately, Wyatt lost his battle with cancer last spring.



January also brought the IIR Stars Equestrian team to our side of town. We'd been wanting to have a team Christmas party, but things kept coming up. January was a bit late, but we were finally able to settle on a date. Not everyone could come, but it was fun times for everyone who did, with a "white horse" exchange, food, and just fun being together.





January brought about some firsts for Piper as well: her first ski trip (with Riverland Hills Youth Group), her first time hauling a horse trailer with her truck, and her first jumping lessons. Adrian Mack's gentle teaching techniques really paid off, as Piper truly has the jumping bug now! Meanwhile, the ski trip was a huge success, though it was artificial snow (didn't get cold enough). That didn't matter to this group, who had a great time and really enjoyed spending it together and playing in the snow.



Amber also attended Riverland Hills Baptist Church's Middle School winter retreat. Lee and I are so happy the girls love church - Zakk and Bart have done such a great job with our youth! They learn about the Lord, defending their faith, and have a great time doing it.



February brought a great change for Amber - the removal of yet another brace from her life. After the second round of braces (roof of the mouth, on the teeth) she became free of them in February. Retainers and a back brace are all she has left to deal with. Both girls also completed their last IEA show and both Piper and Amber qualified for Zones. On the way to the last show, we stopped with our friend Lexi in Mount Airy, NC - where the Andy Griffith Show was based and where he grew up. It was a fun rest stop!

Even with our crazy schedule, Piper kept up her Riverbanks Zoo internship, her work at Chick-Fil-A, and her "Distinguished" grades in all honors courses. She's such a hard worker! Meanwhile, Amber had also set a tough schedule for herself: after her leg atrophied last summer, I

encouraged her to sit out the season and rebuild her strength. She ignored me and worked to rebuild while competing. Every day, this sweet girl was either doing physical therapy, working out, conditioning, riding, or some combination of both. She also stayed on the honor roll at school and participated in her church activities while working to qualify. An amazing, hardworking young lady.



We also had the honor of attending Samuel Leslie's Eagle Scout Ceremony. Piper and Samuel have been friends at church for years and we are so proud of this young man.





Hammond's February activities included the 7th/8th grade dance (can't believe Amber's growing up so fast) and the Sophomore trip: touring colleges. Piper and friends toured High Point, Washington and Lee, Elon, Virginia Tech, and a few others as they made the rounds through NC and VA.



March brought a cold and SNOWY (!?) Zone finals in Tryon, NC. Our teams headed up and the first day, Amber achieved the goal she'd set for herself back in August: she made it to Nationals with a first place ribbon at Zones. My heart burst with happiness for her - all her hard work, effort, pain, toil, and practice had paid off. As we read in Phillipeans 4:13 we are reminded, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me." Other members of her team also qualified and the team qualified as a group. We knew lots of us were heading to Oklahoma in June!



However, you had to place top two and Piper was unfortunately third. The competition was so fierce and I was so disappointed for her: it's hard to celebrate with one and be sad for the other. However, my "always see the bright side" child made lemonade out of lemons by being so happy and proud of her sister that she made things easier on the rest of us. God has truly blessed us with Piper's gentle and quiet spirit and her ability to always find the good in every situation, no matter what is thrown at her. We were Oklahoma bound.

Piper continued to work hard on her Riverbanks Zoo internship, being trained throughout the year to work with small animals. The Hissing Cockroach seemed to take her the most work, but she's learned to love these little creatures as well. If you visit the zoo, you may see her working with the children's camps or educating the public on one of these small animals. They also have to be trained on the larger animals on exhibit, as guests will ask them questions about those animals as they are displaying the smaller ones as well. She certainly loves animals - and the zoo internship gives her a wonderful opportunity to work with them. As she continues into her third summer in this upcoming year, she will be able to shadow zoo keepers and learn more about the larger animals she loves.



Amber also completed her first large science project and participated in her school science fair. What was the project about, you wonder? Horses, of course. She tested heart rates of geldings and mares to see which were more likely to be elevated after exercise. She'd had to get friends to help her exercise them, learn to listen to their heartbeat through a stethoscope (not as easy as it sounds - they have very quiet hearts) and measure and record all the necessary data. Love how Hammond is bringing these kids along!

Back in January, our dear Coosa had turned 28 years old. Lee and I had been talking about retiring him, but he loved to work and enjoyed being ridden and paid attention to. Amber, however, was beginning to really need a younger horse to ride and Coosa was a Pleasure / Horsemanship horse, not a Reiner. We could not purchase another horse, but we found a beautiful mare that caught our eye: Fancy (show name - "UGA Flippin' Dun It"). How did Amber decide to try her out? By riding at a horse show of course - having never ridden the mare before (so, IEA style...). We met the Pope's (who brought Fancy, our friend Grayson's horse) at our first Ranch Horse Show with the Georgia Ranch Horse Association and Amber





hopped on to ride. Piper took Duke and we had a ball. From reining and horsemanship to ranch riding and trail, the girls were in for a brand-new adventure. Grayson had decided to stop riding and Amber fell in love with Fancy; we decided to officially lease her beginning in April and give Coosa a bit of a break. Fancy was to stay in GA to be ridden on the weekends and Amber would exercise Coosa during the week. It seemed like a perfect fit. We also bit the bullet and purchased our first two-horse trailer - garnet and black - that not only matched Piper's truck but was perfect for Duke and Coosa, should we want (or need) to travel. We could also take Duke for lessons in GA and travel with Fancy if we needed to. Life was grand.

So, April 1st, we officially leased Fancy and began our journey with her. Little did we know...



April 6th, Amber went over to Creekside Farm and rode Coosa. They had a great time together, enjoyed the ride, and Amber loved him and gave him treats. She turned him out as normal and was looking forward to seeing Fancy the next day, for a show in GA. Unfortunately, on the 7th, we got a call from Adrian - Coosa had had a heart attack in the night. He was gone. It still brings tears to my eyes as I write this - he was such a special horse and one of the first lesson horses Piper and Amber had ever ridden. He taught both girls so much with his gentle (and sometimes stubborn) spirit and he was such a huge part of our family. Duke, in the pasture with him, remained (along with Billy and Louis, their pasture mates) with Coosa until we arrived; then, as if they knew, they left to let us grieve and to find their own horse peace. Duke went to Piper and Amber and let them sob into his mane and Adrian and her daughter Brenda provided such help and comfort. Along with the sadness came the complete lack of knowledge of what to do. We miss Coosa so much, but we know he's enjoying the great pastures in the sky and will someday come loping over (on the left lead, not the right one) to



see us again. We thank God for the time we had with Coosa, for the lessons he taught us, and for the love he had for us and us for him. Rest in peace - our good boy.



Such a big part of our lives for such a long time. Rest in Peace, dear, sweet Coosa.

After taking care of Coosa, we left for Georgia to see Fancy and Amber dove into showing her at another ranch horse show (not pictured). It helped her to have her mind occupied with showing and with the sweet little mare, who seemed to understand that something was amiss. Amber tried some new classes out and kept moving from sun-up to sun-down, as did Piper.



Lee and I began talking about what to do and Grayson was willing to let us bring Fancy back to Creekside, so after arrangements were made, Fancy came to meet the folks at Creekside Farm in May. She

quickly gained their hearts, as this little mare is not "mare-ish" at all (usually). Many mares have attitude issues, but Fancy is as sweet as Amber and she quickly made herself at home in Irmo, SC. Until May hit, we traveled back and forth to GA on the weekends to see Fancy and ride. It was a lot of fun! The Pope's have a great place at Flamekissed Farm and every time we go, the girls learn more and little Chewy, one of their dogs, wants my water bottle... and he gets it, too!





Adrian Mack has made things so welcoming at Creekside. She always treated Coosa so special, mixing up his feed just right (he liked the way she did it) and taking care of Duke (swearing she may buy him from us one day and retire to a ranch out west!). She welcomed Fancy to the barn and loves her, too. She loves to have outings with the kids and parents there, so we often meet for dinner and an activity. April was bowling! We are so thankful to have found Creekside and the bonus is, it's right across the street from our home! (Literally - across the street.) While we (obviously) don't mind driving, it's nice to just walk over and ride.



Easter Sunday brought us a teenager! Amber's 13th birthday fell on Easter this year. Her bright smile, sweet and spicy spirit, and love of the world brightens everyone she touches. Between 12 and 13, Amber went to her first school dance, her first overnight church trip, dealt with a broken leg, climbed back to national riding status, worked cows for the first time, and sadly lost Coosa, her friend and partner of 8 years. She's free of braces, discovered that Dippin' Dots can be delivered to your house, had her first makeover, won sportsmanship awards, and stayed on the honor roll at school. God has certainly blessed us. Her sweet, smiling spirit always finds the good in things.



We celebrated Easter with our family at church and in the afternoon were joined by our friends the Schellings and Mariclare. It may be the last Easter with the Schellings, as they did chose to move to Austin, TX when Intel announced the site closure; however, they switched from Intel to Apple out there. David, though Amber's age, is now taller than Piper! I'm sure we'll stay close through the upcoming years, as good friends don't mind the distance. The Schelling's moved to TX in June.



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Both the Huntseat and Western Equestrian teams at Hammond were SCISA State champions last year. To commemorate this, both teams were invited to the state house to be recognized. What an honor!



Our department at PC tries, each year, to have an outing for our graduates (majors and minors) before they graduate. We enjoyed a nice meal at Fatz together and shared memories over the last four years. These "kids" become mine as well over their four years at PC.

Meanwhile, Amber continued to show her horse. She always needs nice shiny boots and Granddaddy always delivers. Here's a "before and after" shot. He could make real money doing that!





Hammond took the 7th grade up into the mountains to Camp Tekoa for their annual trip. The morning wakeup call was to jump in the freezing cold lake and Amber enjoyed (well, not enjoyed) this tradition as well as the hiking, waterfalls, rock climbing, and square dance. This week-long excursion honed not only their outdoor skills but their writing skills as well.



To end the month, Amber attended her first college equestrian clinic, run by Ruth Sorrel, the Western Equestrian coach of the Carolina Gamecocks. She and three barn friends participated and had a blast. Coach Sorrel is an excellent teacher and we scheduled a lesson before Nationals with her as well.



About this time, while working out in the weight room after school, Piper overheard someone talking to Coach Erik Kimrey about his famous Gamecock moment: "The Fade." It took place on 9/23/2000. I remember the date (and the play) well. How, you may wonder... it's the precise moment Piper was



Piper
9/23/2000

born. I had the game on in the delivery room. (I am from SC and we love our football.) SCETV was doing a documentary on Coach Kimrey, who is now Hammond's head football coach and a wonderful man and influence on our team. Piper mentioned that she was born that moment and they decided to include her in the film. What an honor. They interviewed Piper, Daddy, and I and the documentary was released in November of this year. Learning more about Coach Kimrey was so special and we feel so humbled to be a part of this little piece of history.

May entered with a fun art show from the 7th grade artists; what Hammond can do with these kids is amazing. I loved Amber's work that was on display. May also brought with it another Ranch Horse Show and being a part of the Georgia Ranch Horse Association (there is none yet for SC) has been such a blessing. Watching Amber learn and grow with her horse has been so fun. We had also cleared things at Creekside to create a place for our little buckskin mare, so with our new trailer, we loaded Fancy up after the show and brought her to her new home. Amber loves that she can just cross the street and see her, ride her, or just give her some dandelions, which seem to be her favorite snack.

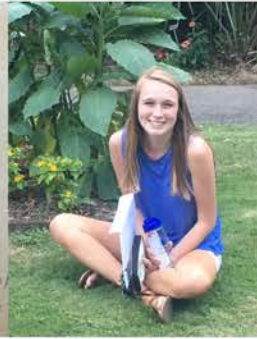




With May came a chance to celebrate Mom's birthday and see Lee's Aunt Jeanette and Aunt Rachel. It was nice to get to see family.

As May came to a close, Piper and Amber both completed the school year strongly, with high grades. Piper also received the President's Award for working over 250 volunteer internship hours with Riverbanks Zoo.

We closed the month with a Memorial Day picnic and said good-bye to our dear friends, Todd, Carrie, David, and Kate, as they were moving to Austin, TX to begin a new life's adventure for their family. Since we've been good friends Amber, David, and Kate's entire lives, this was difficult, but since then, we've already visited each other twice.



May also brought the end of my season with our church's group Run For God. I walked my first 5K in years and Lee completed his first 10K run. I'm so proud of him and everything he's been able to do!



As you probably know, when Amber was ten, she was diagnosed with scoliosis; a rather severe curvature in her case. She has slept in a back brace nightly ever since; however, May showed that the curve had progressed to the point that Dr. Piehl felt surgery was imminent. We scheduled it for December and prayerfully began to ask God to place His mighty hands on her for healing and Dr. Piehl, Lee, and I for guidance as we began to prepare for major back surgery with the insertion of two rods and fusion of 8 vertebrae along with a resulting growth of 2 to 4 inches in height. Cowboy church at the GRHA show that Sunday was actually about the mighty power God has to heal. It began a tough few months of prayer and petition to God to be with her, strengthen her, and touch her.

Last year this time, Amber had just finished surgery to repair her broken leg. She told me that she now understood why - God wanted her to know surgery was nothing to fear. Her biggest worry was that she'd have to end her riding season early; but we knew she'd bounce back. After much hard work, Amber was using June to preparing for IEA National Finals. Her verse became: "I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me. Phil 4:13" We are so proud of her! She was preparing through both conditioning work through Hammond and extra lessons with Mrs. Debra, Coach Ruth, and even Piper chipped in on her instruction. This was in addition to her regular lessons with Mrs. Joy, Mrs. Adrian, and Mr. Dennis - a busy girl.

She still had time for some fun with her friends, though! And Piper was her usual busy self - working for her second summer as an intern at Riverbanks Zoo, working Chick-Fil-A, enjoying Duke, having fun with friends, and helping her dad with some yard work.

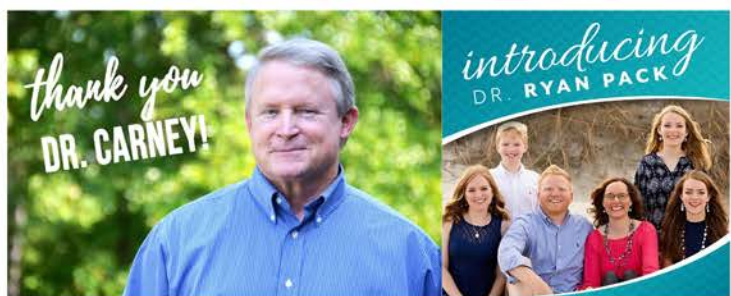




One disappointment from her previous summer's broken leg was that Amber wasn't able to help with Vacation Bible School at Riverland Hills. She was SOOO excited to help this year. She worked with 4 year olds during the week while Piper took second graders. It was such a fun time for them! It was extra special because it was the last VBS before



Dr. Carney's retirement as our senior pastor. We will certainly miss his wonderful sermons; he also was the pastor that spoke to both of the girls when they stepped forward in faith to accept Christ as their Lord and Savior. After speaking with him,



they (and we) were sure they knew exactly what they were doing with their profession of faith and baptism. Happy Retirement, Dr. Carney! Later, in July, we welcomed Dr. Ryan Pack and his family as our new senior pastor. We look forward to his leadership as he shares God's vision for our church.



Before heading to Oklahoma, we had a fun family night with Creekside Farm at San Jose; then the kids went on to Frankies Fun Park to play.

As June came to a close, we packed up the car and drove out to Oklahoma City for Amber to ride at IEA Nationals with her friends and team. On our way out, we found one of our favorite rest stops in Arizona: The Old Mill. This grits mill was one of the scenes in "Gone with the Wind" and it's such a beautiful and peaceful park that we try to stop there each time we pass. Once in OK, we had to visit Cattleman's for one of the best steaks you'll ever eat!



This year, we were lucky enough to travel to OK with many members of our team who had never gone to Oklahoma before, so showing them around the fun city was a treat. We went as a group to the Cowboy and Western Museum and enjoyed aspects of the NRHA Derby and venders throughout the competition. Amber's competition was fierce and she completed her season as one of the top 12 IEA Future Novice Horsemanship finalists in the nation. From starting the season with a broken leg to competing at Nationals, I can't tell you how proud we were of our sweet Amber. We were also treated to our friends the Heir's and their new interesting pet - Herman the Ringtailed Lemur. Herman was about 3 months old in these pictures and loved nuts, bananas, and being wrapped in a blanket. So many visitors from other teams had to come over and take a look at this friendly little fellow.





Since part of Nationals was on Sunday, Piper lead us in "Cowboy Church" - she loves to share God's word!
 We left Oklahoma City, but instead of heading straight home we decided, since we were (sort of) in the neighborhood, we'd visit our friends the Schellings and their new home in Austin, TX. We headed down through Texas and had a great dinner and wonderful visit. Next time, we'll have to plan more time to talk, share, and visit. They have a beautiful new home and seem very happy.
 We drove back home, and were driving on the 4th of July holiday but we had a great trip and loved every minute of it!



Once we returned, both girls traveled with Riverland Hills Baptist for middle and high school beach blast, down to Garden City, SC. This annual trip taken by the youth of our church is much anticipated, with lots of Bible study, sun, and surf. They even ended the week with some youth being baptized in God's great Atlantic ocean. They had a Blast at Beach Blast! Piper also continued her zoo internship, riding Duke, and her work at Chick-Fil-A, and was especially busy on Cow Appreciation Day, when she got to serve her family, all dressed for the occasion.





Between it all, Amber and Piper kept up with summer conditioning requirements - Fit Columbia made it a lot of fun with some aerobatics! We finished July by spending a little time with our family on their annual



beach trip, also to Garden City. You can't live in SC and not visit the beach in the summer time. We were treated while there to a school of dolphin that came by a couple of mornings, leaping out of the water for our entertainment. I love the beach - it's so peaceful.



August started off with Amber deciding to try blue tips on her hair. She knew that Hammond School wouldn't allow it, so we had to cut it off before school, but she LOVED her blue tips. Another task before school started was for Piper to get her wisdom teeth out. Poor thing - she didn't have four, like normal: she had FIVE! Unfortunately, the dental surgeon was only able to get four, but we are all in hopes the fifth one doesn't cause problems down the line.



Piper then headed off with her fellow Riverbanks Zoo interns on the trip of a lifetime. Traveling for three days, they toured behind the scenes of another zoo and a conservation center. She got up close and personal with flamingo, spoonbill, macaw, stingrays, tigers, cheetah, rhino, giraffe, okapi, and many other animals. She viewed a manatee recovery station and hand fed the stingray and giraffe on the trip. It was an amazing adventure and her eyes and stories were filled with wonder and excitement when she returned. She learned how zoos monitor breeding to ensure good matches and saw giant insects and small, deadly snakes. This is a wonderful program for animal lovers - a lot of work with a huge reward.



Our neighborhood also gave us a unique opportunity: many years ago, when the girls were 2 and 5, we took them for a wonderful photo shoot among Black Eyed Susans. We'd always hoped to repeat this when they were older; however, the photographer no longer offered it. However, to decorate the neighborhood this summer, Ascot used (you guessed it!) Black Eyed Susans at the entrances to the neighborhood. With some carefully conceived camera angles, I think I got a few good ones to match up to their younger years.



They've both grown into such beautiful young women - both inside and out. Lee and I are so very blessed.



As August progressed, Piper, now a junior, was asked to be a leader multiple times - by her school as a member of several groups, including one that tours prospective students, by her coach for the Western team, and by her church leaders, where she leads a group of middle school students in Bible study on Wednesday nights. On top of that, she's in all honors or AP courses and is keeping her GPA near the top of her class. We are so proud of her.



Unfortunately, August brought another loss to our family. Lee's aunt, Pearl Sundell, passed away this year. She was so sweet, welcoming, and kind. The girls love the things she's made for them over the years; her crocheting and quilting was absolutely beautiful. She was always smiling and had such a bright outlook on life. We always enjoyed our visits with her. We will certainly miss you, Aunt Pearl.



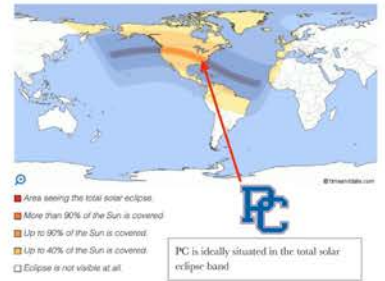
Piper and Amber have also enjoyed riding at Creekside Farm where they have started trying the English style of riding; so, this year, that they decided to cross over and try the Huntseat side of IEA with the Creekside Farm Equestrian team. Amber had her first jumping lesson using Adrian's own steed: Hank. He was such a good boy for Amber's first real time over fences and both she and Piper have the jumping bug.

However, a fun visit to Flamekissed Farm with friends Amanda, Addison, Avery, Jenna and Bailey, along with Duke, and Fancy, still ensures that love of Western horsemanship and reining. I love their adventurous spirits and all-around love of the equestrian sports.





August 21st brought a very special and once in a lifetime event to South Carolina. God blessed our state with a full, total, solar eclipse. As the day approached, many colleges along the path of totality (including our Physics department at Presbyterian College) planned special presentations and lectures. Our church provided eclipse doughnuts and glasses during Sunday service, and many local restaurants had eclipse food. There were eclipse themed milkshakes, doughnuts, popcorn, and other drinks to enjoy as the day drew near, along with many warnings not to look directly at the eclipse, but to use the glasses provided by so many locations. Eclipse t-shirts were also widely available. Schools in the area did not start until after August 21st, as traffic was expected to be terrible with Columbia directly along the path of totality and one of the nearest locations to see the total eclips for millions of people in surrounding



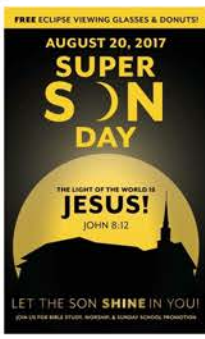
states. School busses were re-purposed for tourist travel and everyone made their plans for where they would be during the event. Many held eclipse parties and others decided to enjoy it from their home.



The HEAVENS declare the glory of God; the Skies proclaim the work of his HANDS
Psalm 19:1

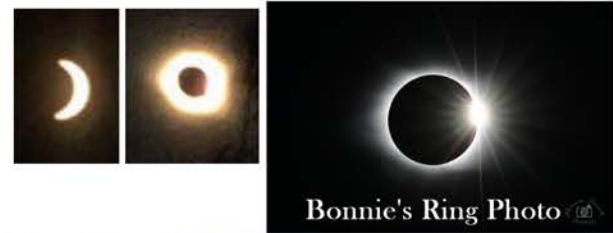
Riverbanks Zoo, working with graduate students at USC, planned to study the effect on the animals and the zoo interns were there to help. The zoo expected to hit capacity between 9 and 10 that morning. Piper helped with guests in the morning and then observed the giraffe behavior throughout the eclipse, recording her findings and even being interviewed by Fox news.

Amber, Lee, and I decided the zoo would be a great place to spend the day and enjoyed a wonderful (and very hot) day there. Amber wanted to observe the tiger and we could also observe the Siamang and Lorikeets while there.



We spent a fun day at the zoo and, as the moon started making its way in front of the sun, the animals started reacting. Piper said the female giraffe went to the back of the enclosure (as if to go to their barn for the night) while the males ran back and forth through the enclosure. Amber watched the tiger as she roared and roared; went in and out of her pool of water, and paced the enclosure. A friend of Piper's told her that the male cockatoo, who sits in the nest during the day, came out. The female sent him back in as soon as the sun came back out! The eclipse glasses were perfect, but at totality, everyone took them off to view the wonder of God's sky. It was awesome. As totality both approached and ended, we watched the crescent moon shaped shadows on the ground. The eclipse left us with a feeling of awe struck wonder.

Lee took better photos than I did; however, our fellow Run For God friend, Bonnie Smith, is an amazing photographer and took a time-lapse of the eclipse. I showed it above (one page back) and can get you her information if you'd like to order a print for your home.



Bonnie's Ring Photo



Our family got a shock at the end of August. Charles Witherspoon "Spoon" Huggins, my Dad's cousin, passed away suddenly. He was a wonderful family man and leader in his community. His always jovial nature was something we looked forward to at family reunions and we will all miss him dearly.



As the new IEA season got underway, the girls had their photos taken with the team for the yearbook. I love the extra "buddy shot" of this company - gives me a great sister photo.



August also brought my parent's 48th wedding anniversary. They are so happy together! We celebrated at a local restaurant and had a nice meal. Piper and Amber also had their first days as an 8th grader and high school Junior.

The girls had also been talking to Adrian Mack across the street about her Huntseat IEA team; Adrian started them on her team and both began learning to jump crossrails.



September brought, for Hammond School's 8th grade, the 8th grade speech. Each year, the 8th graders are told to choose a topic and create a speech that is then given to the entire middle school (and families of those talking). While some kids try to put this off as long as possible (March or April of next year) Amber begged to get to school early on sign up day so that she could be one of the first. Speeches are to be about something significant - either in their lives or in the world. Amber chose as her topic the story of her broken leg. She did an amazing job - so poised. She's grown up so much.



As Amber's orthopedic appointment approached, I prayed so hard for her. I met with Tim Hawkins at Riverland Hills for one-on-one prayer and can't tell you all how blessed I felt by it. As I left his office, I prayed "God, I just wish I knew everything would be okay." Something told me to take the stairs instead of the elevator. It was a path less traveled and feeling emotional, I decided I would. As I reached the bottom of the stairs, I saw a walking cane leaning against the wall. I almost cried. One of my favorite movies is "Miracle on 34th Street" and from it one of my favorite quotes: "Faith is believing when common sense tells you not to." The cane reminded me of the movie's last scene and this quote and I felt a peace wash over me - everything was going to be okay. God was in control.

The day of the next GRHA show was approaching and that morning, we were to go to see Dr. Piehl for an x-ray that he felt positive would confirm our surgery date for December. I picked Amber up from school and she had a great attitude - she said it would all be okay. She'd take her exams early, get a longer Christmas break, and many other things to look forward to while she recovered. She had the x-ray and we waited for the results. Dr. Piehl came in and told us the curve's measurement had regressed - she would not need the surgery in December! We were so happy, excited, relieved. God has blessed us so very much! Praise God from whom all blessings flow! Thank you all for your prayers and concern. This doesn't mean she will never have surgery; but it may mean that! Either way, no surgery in the near future!

Amber went to the show with the happiest attitude and had one of her best shows ever. She and Fancy were certainly coming together as a team.



September also brought us Piper's 17th birthday and Lee and I celebrated 20 years of happily married life. The time has really flown by. I remember people telling me it would and thinking "I know, but..." However, the "but" has really shown itself, especially as the girls grow older. Can't believe Piper is 17. To celebrate our anniversary, Lee drove up to PC and surprised me with a beautiful bouquet of flowers! He is so good to me. I'm so grateful to God for the time he has given us together.



Piper's birthday happened to be a weekend of (you guessed it) a horse show. Our first Huntseat IEA show with Creekside Equestrian Team. Both Piper and Amber got points and we had a wonderful time. Lots of new horse friends and we got to see our old friend, Sara Stuart, who rides for Furman's Equestrian team and was schooling horses for us that day. The team went out of their way to make Piper's birthday feel special, too. It was very sweet! At the end of the show, the team unanimously voted that Amber was the biggest helper of the show. She was so touched that they chose her.



I also found a great poem that summed up a lot of things for me - I thought I'd share it with you here because I don't want to forget it: **Why God Made Little Girls.** God made the world with its towering trees, Majestic mountains and restless seas, Then paused and said, "It needs one more thing... Someone to laugh and dance and sing, To commune with nature in quiet hours." So God made little girls, With laughing eyes and bouncing curls, With joyful hearts and infectious smiles, Enchanting ways and feminine wiles, And when He'd completed the task He'd begun, he was pleased and proud of the job He'd done, For the world, when seen through a little girl's eyes, Greatly resembles Paradise. - Author Unknown

At the end of the horse show, which was in Greenville, Lee and I took the girls by Furman's campus - it was our 20th wedding anniversary month and that's where Lee proposed. Right near the Bell Tower. They say, if you kiss a boy under the bell tower, you will be married. Well... you know the rest of THAT story.





As October came along, we got to visit with two wonderful families. As their son is at USC, on Parent's Weekend, the Angles came to stay with us and visit with him. Piper and Elaina always love the opportunity to catch up - these two special friends have been "besties" since the age of 3, proving that you don't have to live next to each other to maintain a special friendship.



Our friends the Schellings were also back for a visit - during Kate and David's fall break, they came back to SC to visit friends and some old haunts. We spent a great afternoon catching up. While we miss them living here, again, just because you don't live nearby doesn't mean that friendships stop. They told us fun stories of their adventures in their new home; then we pointed out that, as amazing as Austin sounds, they still vacation in SC.

We also made a family decision - to add a member permanently. "UGA Flippin' Dun It" (yes - that's Fancy!) went from a lease to an own, as we talked to the Akins and purchased her. Her sweet personality and gentle nature won us over and we decided to make it official.



Fall brought fun evenings at Riverland Hills Baptist and additional barn outings with Creekside Farm. Amber's horse painting was really quite good!



Piper also enjoyed her first official college visit. She went to visit with Sara Stuart at Furman and joined her for her classes and for her lesson as a part of Furman's Equestrian Team. We ended the trip with an admission's tour. How did she grow up so fast? Turns out that one of the horses at Furman used to belong to Adrian's daughter Brenda. It's such a small world!



We had a fun Halloween, with Amber and Mariclare meeting to go visit the neighbors and trick-or-treat; a tradition that Ascot (our neighborhood) continues into the teen years. Instead of giving out candy at the house, we took ours over to the barn across the street and gave out candy with our Creekside Barn family while the equestrians hit the neighborhood. It's so much fun to share fun times with fun people.



Piper and Amber are now what IEA calls "Cross over" riders - they ride both Western Horsemanship and Reining as well as Huntseat Equitation on the flat and Equitation over cross rails. They've been riding in shows and getting points in each discipline toward IEA Regional finals. It's so exciting to see them branch out into new ways to enjoy these animals they love so much. Last December, Amber received what I think is a higher honor than a blue ribbon - the IEA Sportsmanship award for a show. This November, Piper also received this honor. So proud of my girls - not only great riders but great sports to others. Can't wait to see what the future holds for them!





Amber also has branched out into ranch riding this year. She's grown as a rider and learned so much through the Georgia Ranch Horse Association and the American Ranch Horse Association. She's now entered classes like Trail and Ranchmanship, Ranch Riding and Ranch Reining, Herd Work and Cutting (cow classes!) and, of course, maintained Horsemanship and Reining. Our last show for the year was in November and, in her first year of showing ranch, Amber ended up top 10 in the region and top 20 nationally. She also ended her IEA year in the top 12 in the nation for IEA Western Horsemanship. She put points on the board for Creekside

Crossrails, all while keeping her grades up, attending church services and extra-curricular trips and activities. She's always busy doing something. Piper's led Cowboy Church and seems to have a real passion for missions. Both our girls have now had the honor of competing where Olympians once rode.



We were also able to view the wonderful documentary by Les Carol on Hammond's famous football coach, Erik Kimrey. Coach Kimrey, a former Gamecock, once threw what has become a legendary pass in a Carolina football game. It's called "the fade." If you ask any Gamecock fan where they were when he threw the fade, they can tell you. Well, so can I - I was giving birth to Piper (and the game was on in the delivery room - yes, I kid you not - I like football!). She was born either at or within a minute or so of this famous play. Since she is now also a Hammond student (and has had PE with Coach Kimrey in the past), she, my Dad, and I were included in the documentary. What an honor - Coach Kimrey is such a wonderful influence on Hammond and their athletes - not only leading them to 9 state championships as a football team, but leading them in life, taking the team out during the floods of 2015 to help clear away damage and bring people's furniture and heavier items out to dry in the sun. He's done amazing work and I'm so glad that Piper and other Hammond students get to learn from his example. The documentary aired on SCETV's station on November 5th and a DVD is for sale through their website, if you want to learn more.



November also brought Lee's second 10K run. He did it after a week in Austin for Intel and knowing that we were leaving immediately to watch the girls in a horse show. "Busy-ness" is our normal!



One of my students honored me by asking me to walk on the football field with his family on Senior Day at PC, as his faculty mentor. I've known Joe since his Freshman year - he's grown and changed so much in these four years, as they all do. It's hard to believe that four years have gone by so quickly.

Mama and I also went on our annual trip to the Carolina Craftsmans Christmas Classic. Each year, we head to the fair grounds to check out the new items the crafters bring.



In November, Piper was invited to join the National Honor Society. It was a beautiful ceremony and we are so very proud of our hard-working daughter.



Walking home from Creekside, Amber saw something moving in the bushes near our front door - turns out it was a yellow bellied sapsucker. We're guessing it flew into our front window. She jumped into action (there are a lot of cats around). We put it in a box and Piper, Amber, and Lee took it to the Wildlife Conservation Center. They promised to take care of him and felt he'd recover and be re-released soon. This little fellow is actually protected by Federal Law. We hope he'll be okay.



Thanksgiving brings family and friends to share a traditional meal and enjoy time together. Making memories. Mama and Daddy, Mom, and Clint (from church) joined us for turkey, dressing, and all the fixin's. After dinner, we took some photos of the family with the horses. Then, Piper joined her friend Eliana and her family for some Black Friday Shopping - they shopped from 8pm to 8am and had a blast!





Lee's time with Intel is coming to a close, as they are closing the Columbia site in December. While they keep asking him to transfer to Austin, TX, we believe as a family that God would like us in SC. We are still praying and looking at all our options. Please keep our family in your thoughts and prayers as we make this life decision.

Well, that's our year. As usual, it was full of wonderful times and sad times; growth and learning; and lots of new adventures. We wish you all a Merry Christmas - may you find God's peace in the new year.

*Love,
Lee, Paige, Piper, Amber,
Tango, Oreo, Snowball
Duke, and Fancy*

