

Meeker Christmas Newsletter 2019

Merry Christmas!

2019 has certainly proven to be a wild and crazy year. As any year, it's been filled with the ups and downs of life; so many changes have come to our family. Time marches on, as both our girls have become more independent this year - one daughter as a college freshman; the other through driving on her own. It happens so fast. Hope you enjoy as we share our year with you.



Last November, we adopted a little Sheltie puppy - Fynn! He has been such a joy to us as he's grown this last year. The funniest part throughout the year has been the continual saga of "who gets the dog bed?" Oreo can make himself surprisingly small to fit into it! We even purchased four (now, back down to one with lots of pulling and chewing to rid us of the other three) at one time, but at this point, only Oreo occasionally tries to get in; it's become more of a toy to drag around and chew on. Oh, well!



December brought about a Hammond tradition - closing the circle of our enrollment there. 14 years ago, Piper, as a K-4 student, was paired with a senior and the two of them helped decorate a Christmas tree. Each year, this tradition has continued with slight alterations - location, type of ornament,



etc. This year, as a senior, Piper participated once again and was paired with the cutest little girl! Such a special time for all parents involved. I remember being that K-4 parent - and now, Lee and I were the Senior parents. Such an emotional and lovely ceremony.



Black Friday, Piper misplaced her beloved Dooney and Burke Disney wallet. We could only find these at Disney - now, yes, you can get them online but because the fabric stretches differently over each one, it's important to pick out the one you want. She was down over the loss; and I love to make Christmas special.

As a surprise, I got up REALLY early with Mama and Daddy and we did the craziest thing - we went to Disney for the day! Yep - within a 24 hour timespan we traveled from Columbia to Orlando and back. I'd called down and the very kind folks at the Grand Floridian resort were holding three wallets to choose from. We arrived around noon and enjoyed all the Christmas decorations of the Grand Floridian. Then, we hopped onto the Monorail and visited the Contemporary and Polynesian! It's so beautiful at Christmas there.



I was able to find some delicious treats for both girls, too. Then, we drove over to the Beach and Yacht Club to see the beautiful chocolate and gingerbread carousel and miniature village before hitting the road back home. Her face when she opened it made it all worthwhile! A couple of months later, to our surprise, her friend Eliana found the original wallet - it had fallen during a visit behind a piece of furniture. It was such a relief to find it.

Of course, the biggest event of last December was Amber's surgery. We had prayed that she would not have to have it, but that was not God's plan. In the days leading up to the surgery, she worked to do all the things she knew she wouldn't be able to do for a while. This included her two sporting activities - karate and horseback riding. Amber had seen to her baby, Fancy, and friend McKinney was to lease her, giving McKinney a horse to ride and Fancy exercise. She also talked to each of her teachers about taking her exams early. All but one agreed so she took four exams in the week before her scheduled surgery - and found out after Christmas she aced all of them! We were so proud of her.



The morning of the surgery 12/17, we got to the hospital before 6am and they took her back quickly. We were so blessed to have family and friends throughout the day to sit with us, pray with us, and check on us. Around 6:00pm, Dr. Piehl told us everything had been successfully completed! I went back to recovery to stay with her but had not eaten all day. So, I passed out. (Mom fail.) Lee came to stay with Amber while Piper and my cousin Kim met me in the ER as they gave me fluids for about half an hour before they let me get back to her. Mama and Daddy had already left to take care of our dogs but returned quickly when they heard about me! About 2am that morning (Lee and I stayed in the room with Amber) she was wired and

talking to me - and she said "Mom, did you pass out?" She remembered! The scariest thing to her was that she couldn't see when she first woke up in recovery - no one had told her that there would be a film put over her eyes to keep them moist during surgery. She was afraid her vision had been affected and we were all relieved to find out it wasn't.



The next few days in the hospital taught us to manage pain. Within a day, Amber was up and walking - and 2 INCHES TALLER! I was amazed how quickly she went from sitting up in the bed to sitting on the edge to walking in the room to walking down the hall to walking around the hall! The nurses at Palmetto Children's Hospital are awesome - looking out for her and guiding her and





pushing just enough. Since we were there right before Christmas, the hospital also had us go down and choose a massive amount of gifts, including t-shirts, games, a live (and decorated) Christmas tree, which they then wrapped and packaged up for Amber to enjoy when she got home. So unexpected! Amber also enjoyed looking at the ceiling tiles, hand-painted by other patients and especially loved the one of Dobby (from Harry Potter) dressed in a hospital gown holding a hospital sock.

She had us take her picture on her release and captioned it "Amber is a free patient!" (She's a big Harry Potter fan!) All the visits from family and friends meant so very much both in the hospital and when we got back home. We so appreciate the prayers and support and can't thank you enough.



We got home from the hospital on 12/22 and could not travel for Christmas this year, so Christmas and family came to our house. Amber enjoyed photos with



the dogs, in boxes and with the trees, as well as in the Santa hats I found in a closet. After Christmas, she wanted to include the barn in her daily walking and exercise routine, so we visited Fancy and all our barn friends. We took it day by day, but she was intent that she wanted to get back to normal as soon as possible.



When school started in January, Amber was back on the first day, complete with her rolling backpack. Picking up too much weight was strictly forbidden. She started with a half-day, then went the entire day and never looked back. Friends helped her if stairs were involved to get her backpack where it needed to go and with the new elevators in the renovated building, Hammond had everything she needed. She completed her 5th and final exam, did well, and started the spring semester without missing a beat.

January brought new adventures.

Fynn discovered my exercise ball and

had a great time playing around with it. Another Hammond tradition is the

"senior speech," so in January, Piper addressed the high school in assembly and did a great job. Meanwhile,

Amber's art was so beautiful in the high school show.

The RHBC high school ski retreat took the group to West Virginia; Amber was disappointed to miss it. Piper had a great time on her last one as a senior and Amber and I hit Riverbanks Zoo instead. Our visits with Dr. Piehl were all good and we were making progress.

We also were a part of Creekside Farm and Flamekissed Equestrian teams making it to the next level of competition and both teams were heading to IEA Regional finals. Flamekissed ended the western season with the most points of any team in Region 4, and Piper ended her senior regular season having the best one of her equestrian career, in both disciplines, thanks to her amazing coaches Amanda Pope and Adrian Mack! She also loved feeding "Moo" marshmallows. :) Most exciting for Amber was Dr. Piehl's promise that, if she was careful, she could get back on her horse soon.

Not as exciting for me was the discovery that I needed glasses. However, having a great tint to them makes it much easier not only to read but to drive at night. Time marches on.



PIC-COLLAGES

Dr. Piehl's "soon" for Amber came on my birthday - Piper helped her saddle Fancy and she was SO happy to be able to get back on her horse. She started off at a walk, then a slow jog, then back to a walk. She was thrilled! Her happiness (and Fancy's sweet patience and safe ride) was the best gift I could have asked for!

We celebrated by heading to our favorite SC restaurant down at the coast - the Sea Captain's House. We enjoyed a wonderful meal and family time walking around at some of the shops there before heading home. That's what's great about SC - not too far from the beach or the mountains!



Later in February, we attended the South Carolina Quarter Horse Association's annual banquet where we saw friends, other youth, and Piper and Amber both received awards for their previous year's work. It was so nice to see everyone.

Amber also continued her Riverbanks Zoo internship program and was able to handle some of the education animals. The one that surprised me the most was "Maize" - the corn snake! While she was restricted in activities, she was happy, sleeping without a back brace for the first time since age 8, and not in pain. However, this was partly because some of the nerves in her back were still "asleep" from the surgery. As feeling started returning to those areas, it would catch her off guard, but all progress was good.



February also brought IEA Regional finals for Creekside's Huntseat team. As a senior, IEA really treated Piper well - they invited all the seniors with their coaches to be recognized for their participation and accomplishments. She was presented with a very nice plate to remember her IEA competitive years by. Such a nice treat! Adrian Mack has been such a Godsend for our family - taking care of our horses and our girls with such grace and love.

Little Fynn also continued to grow - getting bigger and more of a "teenager" as we moved toward his 6 month birthday!



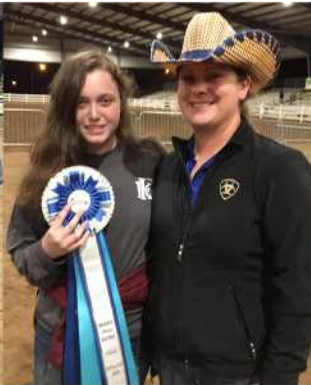


The beginning of March brought Riverland Hill's "Disciple Now" weekend and Amber and Piper both enjoyed a weekend filled with Biblical learning and friends. Amber couldn't participate in all the activities, but enjoyed it just the same.



Amber was allowed more freedom to try more activities - she could work on her karate movements, as long as she didn't apply force behind them, and she was happy to be back. Amber continued to ride; walking and

jogging and rebuilding. I walked over after the girls one day to find her bareback - she said she wasn't "allowed" to lift her saddle. *sigh* She really hoped to participate in IEA Western Regional Finals - she'd gotten all her points - and started pushing herself toward that goal. Dr. Piehl said as long as it didn't hurt, she could try. However, to her immense disappointment, loping the horse started to hurt and she knew she had to stop trying. She was upset, but very mature about it. Lee and I were so proud of her, but sad with her, too.



When Western Regionals rolled around, Amber had hoped to compete, but since she could not, she went to work - helping hold horses, advise, support her team, etc. Piper had a great finish and moved on to Semifinals, finishing as reserve champion for the entire region! Amber received the IEA Sportsmanship award for the show for all her hard work. So proud of them!



As the school year was nearing an end, lots of senior memories were being made - girls trip to WinterJam and the senior beach trip! Piper headed to the beach with her Riverland Hills friends for their senior retreat. Lots of excitement mixed with sadness as graduation was fast approaching.





Throughout the last two years, Piper participated in a new program at Hammond - PPSC - Public Policy for Social Change. Students in this program volunteer, work on a project for social change, and give a TedX Talk to summarize their experience. It was so wonderful to watch my daughter, usually a little stage-shy, get up on stage and speak passionately about conflict minerals and why it's so important to recycle electronics. If you'd like to see her talk, Ted Talks has published it online. Google "Piper Meeker TedX conflict minerals" to see it.



Mid-April, Amber's 15th birthday came with the excitement of a driving test. It was during her spring break and she worked at the zoo all week, but saved Friday morning for the DMV... and she was successful! She got her drivers permit and life was certainly good!

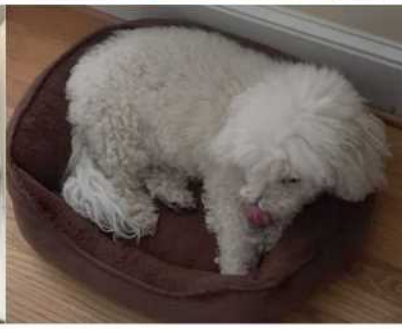
Piper was also so excited to begin thinking about Anderson. Then... she got a cookie in the mail! Mrs. Whitaker, the president's wife, makes them for the students during exams and, it seems also for the incoming freshmen! You'd have thought she had been given a piece of gold she was so happy.



April also brought prom season and Piper's senior prom was upon us. She and I went dress shopping and had a ball! We've now purchased two dresses from Catz Formals and I have to say I LOVE shopping there. Definitely where I'll start when it's Amber's turn. The pre-prom photo was taken at a friend's home and they brought in some exotic animals to add to the photo fun. Piper and Lucas loved holding the lemur's and taking a photo with the zebra. They had a great time at the prom!



Hammond School Senior Class



Easter brought time with family and Fynn, Oreo, and Snowball's continued "discussion" over who belonged in the dog bed. It was so funny to watch them get in and out of it.



IEA Western Semifinals also treated the seniors well; acknowledging their work and accomplishments. Unfortunately, Piper was not chosen to move forward to Nationals, but we were so proud of her rides and her hard work this season. It's the best season she's ever had - the most points, and the happiest. I was so glad she ended it on a high note. Many thanks to Amanda Pope for all her hard work with these kids. Her kindness and caring shines through, allowing them to always do their best.



As April came to a close, so did Piper's last year of ZooTeen's (and Amber's first). The program runs from May to April and they ended with a nice banquet for all the participants. It has been a great experience for Piper and Amber.



It was also time to think about a senior photo shoot - and Bonnie Smith Photography came to our place and Bonnie did a wonderful job! She took some amazing photos of Piper, our family, with and without cap and gown. It was so much fun - we haven't done a photo shoot in a long time. It was also another reminder that her high school years were coming to a close.

Bonnie took so many beautiful photos it's hard to pick which ones to include here. She also included Piper's babies - the horses and dogs. Mama and Daddy graciously donated their beautiful gardens for a backdrop, and Adrian let us use the barn's field of yellow flowers. It was perfect.



May began with celebrating the graduation of a friend - Lochlain Angel, Elaina's brother, was graduating from USC as Piper and Elaina would graduate from high school later that month. So happy to get to share this special time with such special friends!



May at Hammond was full of tradition (old and new) for the seniors, starting with a banquet for the PPSC (Public Policy for Social Change) Seniors and special recognition at Award's Day and Graduation. This was the first year for PPSC at Hammond to have graduates; of all the kids that started the program, only five finished. The teachers who worked with them did a wonderful job! The school treated them so well, with a beautiful notebook, nice banquet dinner, and pin of recognition to wear at graduation. What a treat!



Piper was also thrilled to have her last day in a uniform, though she confessed later that it had been nice to never have to worry about what to wear!



Hammond also has a day set aside to give all the students their year books - "Annual Day." Graduating seniors receive their year books before underclassmen in a ceremony where they are called across stage and are given a special yearbook engraved with their name. Then, everyone has time to sign the rest of the day and any other days they bring it back with them.



Another fun tradition was to paint their skirts. Senior girls paint their skirts in the colors and mascots of their chosen college. Then, the girls and guys all wear a white polo and sign the shirts and the girls wear their skirts. Some of them are quite artistic! I loved Piper's AU Honors Trojan skirt! She made a special request that a white polo be purchased this year and I didn't know why! But she was planning ahead.



Piper and her friends all worked hard on their skirts - it's a fun tradition! With each end of year celebration, we inched closer and closer to graduation.



Meanwhile, Amber was working hard to complete her freshman year strong. Her class was given a project to create an educational way to teach others about the Plague (Black Death). Amber decided on a board game and she went ALL OUT! She hand-made the pieces from clay she baked and artfully created the design for the board. Then, she raided her closet and found an old game she no longer played and printed stickers of her design to go over it. She made cards with questions that would move your player through Europe and you hoped to survive! She even took a cube of wood and burnt dots to make her own die to roll. Amber's eye for detail and love of art and education will take her far! I'm sure of it! It's also another way Hammond encourages the kids' creativity.



The week of exams for other students was, for the seniors, the Hammond Senior Trip. Piper was blessed to have two teachers as chaperones that she's known for 14 years - Jim Lalumondier, her K4 art teacher, and Tom Manke, the school's resident naturalist. Hammond is such a unique experience as they open and close the circle through the years. How special! The seniors were encouraged to push their comfort zones and this found Piper mountain biking, rock climbing, and enjoying one last trip with her classmates. Many of these kids have traveled on an annual trip since 4th grade. The last one was fun, exhausting, and bittersweet.





Riverland Hills also had a special service for the seniors and a luncheon for the families. Bart had a wonderful message for the seniors and their families as they were moving toward college and the church sent them off well also. Seeing the rainbow of robes from all the different area high schools was also fun! As each senior was announced, their senior photo and baby photo were displayed for them to walk across the stage.



The day before graduation was the last day of exams for everyone else. I got one last "Last Day of School" photo with both my girls in front of the chapel. Then, Piper, Lee, and I headed off to the lower school gymnasium for the Senior breakfast while Amber went to take her last exam as a high school freshman. Chris Angel and his wife host this event for the kids and then they take them all away for graduation practice at First Presbyterian Church downtown, where graduation was to be held the next day.



Hammond School Class of 2019

At this special breakfast for the seniors and families, each one was recognized for what makes them special. The talk about Piper made us so very proud as parents - not only recognized for her academic and equestrian ability, but mainly for how she displays her faith and values. She is such a strong, Christian young woman, mature beyond her years in many ways. We are so very proud of her. Listening to our video, I transcribed the comments read by Chris Angel about our firstborn:

"With a foundation built in a values-based home, informed by a strong Christian faith, Piper has grown into a young woman whose conscientious and caring nature leads her to take responsibility for herself and others, in a way that the adults around her admire greatly. Piper has a real heart for others - both humans and animals, which is evident in her choice of extracurricular activities including a decorated equestrian career, a four year internship with Riverbanks Zoo, and a Public Policy for Social Change project through which she researched conflict minerals and created a used electronics recycling initiative to reduce deforestation of endangered species. Piper has proven herself to be a scholar with a servants heart and we look forward to watching her impact her new community in the honors program at Anderson University this fall. Piper Meeker."

That and the slide show which included photos of she and her classmates all the way back to K4 was the first time I shed a tear! Piper told me that was *exactly* how she wanted to be remembered.



14 Years of First Day of School. The time flew by way too fast.



Graduation was held in First Presbyterian Church downtown and Piper was so happy to have her family around her to celebrate! The speaker was Vallie Collins, a survivor of Flight 1549, who paid tribute to the Miracle on the Hudson and five things she learned and wanted to share with the graduates:

1. Be kind to others. You never know when that's the last time you'll see them. Leave a good impression.
 2. Have empathy for others.
 3. Be physically fit - you never know when you may need to swim in 35 degree water on a 22 degree day - it could save your life.
 4. Keep proper perspective - no one was worried about anything but seeing their loved ones again on that flight.
 5. Value your time.
- What valuable lessons to share. Then, the senior class walked across the stage to receive their diplomas.





We came back to the house for a graduation party and enjoyed the celebration so very much. 14 years of hard work and dedication led Piper to her future - the Honor's College at Anderson University.

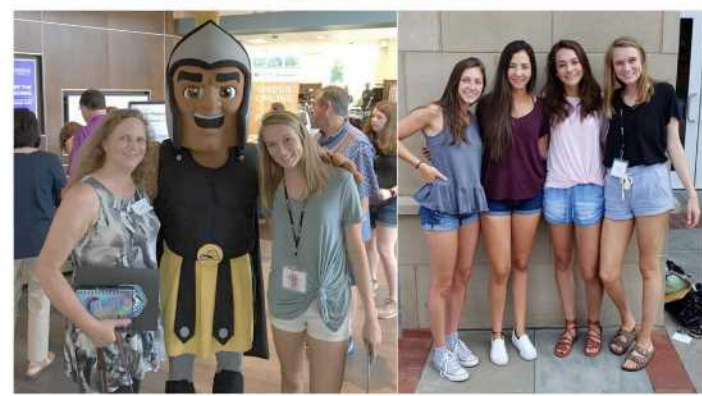




Piper also attended her last meeting as a ZooTeen. She and Amber both got to handle the timireks, which are such adorable little creatures!

The week after graduation was college orientation! Wow - that was fast! Piper and Eliana, her roommate, drove up in one car and Loraine and I (Ellie's mom) drove up in another. We met up with another friend going there (OG) for lunch and then started "Base Camp!"

We went for the day and the girls stayed in the dorms overnight and came home after a few other meetings the next day. So exciting to see this from the "other side" as we are now the freshman and parent. We learned about Anderson, expectations, finances, dorms, books, social organizations, food, meal plans, and all the details about college life. The kids also had meetings with others in the same major interest, so some meetings they had together, and some apart, as Piper is a science major and Ellie humanities. Lee got to join us later in the day and there was a nice dinner before we headed home. It was certainly quick, coming on the heels of Piper's graduation and the day before Ellie's!



Early June brought a visit from friends Carrie, David, and Kate. So glad we have been able to keep close and visit each other - even though we are now several states away. It was great to see them and get to catch up!



When school let out and graduation celebrations were complete, we headed down to our friend Tracey's for a fun meeting with Flamekissed! There, Amanda recognized Piper as the graduating senior and all the kids rode, swam, and had a ball. Amber, in her swimsuit, showed off her scoliosis scar (all the way down her back) and we were having a great time. Then, Piper got an email... from IEA... saying she was the recipient of a scholarship! We decided we could make the trip to Oklahoma City for her to receive it in person and took the trip faster than we ever had before. Turns out that she received the top award given - \$1000! We are so very proud of her. We had a great trip, got to cheer on our individual riders that were competing, and our middle school team, which ended up placing third in the nation! For the first year even having a team, Amanda did a wonderful job and these kids worked so hard! What a great trip!



We had to stop at our favorite rest stop in Little Rock, Arkansas - the Old Mill. So beautiful and peaceful. So worth the trip into Little Rock!



We had another visit from some great family friends - the Girards! Dudley, Stella, and Vera Ann were back in SC, visiting old haunting grounds and old friends. We had a great dinner together and really enjoyed catching up.





Amber saw Dr. Piehl upon our return and was completely cleared for all activities except bungee jumping, trampoline jumping, and he'd prefer she not do crunches. She was okay with all of this and we attended the SCQHA horse show in Camden for her first show since surgery. She and Fancy had a great time and we so enjoyed seeing our friends again.

Unfortunately, and unexpectedly, Amber had to face one other surgery - her dental x-rays showed her wisdom teeth coming in at an almost 90 degree angle - so she had to get them out - right then. Her goal for 2020? No more surgery!

For the 4th of July, we were home and I thought it would be a great photo opportunity to take our family flag and get a photo with Duke and Fancy. Both horses were good after they checked out the flag and made sure it wouldn't "eat" them! They were very suspicious!



July was busy as well (what's new there, right?) as both girls headed to Garden City, SC for Riverland Hills Baptist's high school Beach Blast. They had such a fun time; Piper went for the entire week as a middle school counselor and then a high school participant. So much fun!



For graduation, Piper had asked for a trip to - you guessed it - Walt Disney World! She just loves it there. To make this trip unique, we planned new experiences that we'd never done there before. Every day had something new planned!

On our first day of fun, we had tire trouble on the way down but made it with time to visit the virtual reality experience "The Void" (Star Wars). Holodecks aren't too far in the future! It was so cool! Enjoyed the Polite Pig BBQ for dinner and continued the adventure the next day. When we checked in to Pop Century, our favorite, we found that they've renovated it - very "modern" rooms now.





The next day, we went on the Senses of Africa Tour - it was AMAZING!!! After a wonderful breakfast at Boma and a backstage tour, we enjoyed Animal Kingdom the rest of the day. It was so fun! The tour included making educational toys for the Red River Hogs, feeding the giraffe some favorite treats, and getting up close and personal with a rarely friendly Okampi! Such shy and endangered animals, this was a real treat for us!





Our third day was EPCOT - we went behind the scenes of The Living Seas and met Calvin, Malibar, and Renier - the three bottlenose dolphins at EPCOT. It was awesome - seeing how their food is made, how their brains are kept active, and getting to meet them up close and personal. Such intelligent and social animals. They were so happy! And so were we! They were training to see if a photo could be made with more than 1 or 2 people - like a family of 4! We agreed to be guinea pigs and got a wonderful photo! Calvin was perfect!

Trivia alert: the aquarium in EPCOT is the second largest in the US - to give you perspective, the park's iconic Spaceship Earth can fit inside it - with room for busses to drive around it!

We spent the rest of the day in EPCOT and had another great day! Lee and Amber hopped to Magic Kingdom while Piper and I headed to the room. We kissed goodbye at Chef de France and one of the waitresses burst into giggles! We are fast approaching anniversary #22 in September!



As much as we love all the parks, it's hard to feel like Disney until you see the castle! Magic Kingdom is our favorite! The Haunted Mansion had a new surprise for us - photo pass! We ended the day with the Fireworks and Desert Party's new garden viewing - holding our breath as a storm rolled in and out - but YUM! Delicious desserts and an Amazing Fireworks show! Just before the fireworks started, a young man took his girlfriend up to the Photopass photographer for a picture and as she was about to take it, he got down on one knee and proposed! Wow! What a special moment! Everyone cheered when she said yes! The Photopass photographer almost missed the moment - she was as surprised as we were! But she got it!





People ask me why go to Disney so much? Well, every day we were there held new things - things we have not done before! Our 5th day, we hit four new things! (1) visiting the Boardwalk and dining at the Bon Voyage Breakfast with Ariel, Eric, Rapunzel, and Flynn Rider. It was DELICIOUS and fun! (2) Then, we headed for the trails - have never done a trail ride at Disney before - saw deer, bunnies, - you know, the "animals of Snow White and Cinderella" aka "the natives" Lee rode Brutus, I was on Duncan, Amber rode Lincoln, and Piper rode Zazu. One of our guides was a former Huntseat IEA member and so much fun to talk to. From there, we headed to the barn where we met Jacob, the draft horse that Merida's horse was modeled after for the movie Brave and we got to see two of the newest Cinderella pony foals! Beautiful!



After the ride, we hit Hollywood Studios to enjoy the new (3) Slinky Dog ride and visit Toy Story Land. We added the (4) Alien saucer spin, ate at Mama Melrose, and Amber and I headed back while Lee and Piper headed on. There's always old favorites, new adventures, and things you wanted to do but couldn't last time!

We went back to Hollywood Studios the next day to ride Toy Story Mania; new things included an Incredible Celebration, meeting Edna and Olaf, and eating at San Angel in EPCOT - then a real treat - the girls gave us a date night! So Lee and I enjoyed a night in the Magic Kingdom with fireworks for the evening. We had a great trip, celebrating Piper's graduation and Amber's successful surgery.





When we returned from Disney, Amber headed out on her first trip with the other interns at Riverbanks Zoo. This time, they went to Kentucky, where they set up camp at Bone Lick State Park for the trip. They got to meet bison, tour the Newport Aquarium, and the Cincinnati Zoo (where they met the baby hippo). It was such a fun trip for her to share with her friends!





While Amber was away, Piper and I went college dorm shopping - so many things to fit into such a tiny room at Anderson! It was so much fun going through Bed Bath and Beyond, Target, Walmart, etc. We put things in the basket we didn't know if we'd use or not, but we figured we could return what we didn't need. Then, we joined her roommate, Eliana, and Lorraine (her mom) for an additional trip to the stores! Time was getting closer and closer to her moving to the next stage of her life.



At the end of July, we were able to head down to the coast one more time to see family for their annual trip. We all love the beach and the peace it brings. Piper and Amber shared some special sister time as well - going to Ripley's Aquarium and enjoying shopping at Broadway at the Beach. Amber was certainly beginning to feel how quickly time was passing by.



So were our dogs, who were getting increasingly concerned at the amount of "stuff" we were collecting to pack. On this trip, we got to see my cousin Lynne, her daughter-in-law Jennifer, and grandchildren Gracie and Brandon along with Aunt Nell, Kim, Mama, and Daddy.

We returned from the beach to send our first baby off to college - no, not Piper - Duke. Since Piper would not be home to exercise him and Amber was in all honors courses at Hammond and rather busy herself, we decided it would be best for Duke to lease him to the St. Andrews University Equestrian IHSA Program with Coach Carla Wennburg. It was hard to leave him, but Carla and her assistant Cailey were so wonderful to send us updates on how he was doing. Duke has settled into college life and really likes his stall and friends in Laurenburg, NC. We were invited to their first show at the end of September, so we could see how he was doing and Piper could ride him and warm him up for them.





We had one last trip before Hammond began and we moved Piper into Anderson. This year, 50 years ago, Mama and Daddy were married! To celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary, they wanted to return to their Honeymoon location of St. Augustine, FL and stay in the same hotel.

They had always wanted to take the girls there, so we took two nights and a day to head down and stay with them at the Ponce de Leon. Being on the waterfront, it was beautiful to sit on a deck at the hotel that evening and watch the herons fly in to fish.



The next day, we headed to MarineLand and we had a special event planned for Mama and Daddy. As a part of their tour, they (and



Piper, as a graduate) got to hold a canvas for three of their dolphins to paint a portrait on! Then, one of the dolphins took a buoy to Daddy to lift out of the water - on it was "Happy 50th Anniversary, Boyce and Martha!" They were so surprised! We enjoyed the behind the scenes tour with them and of course, Piper and Amber loved getting up close to dolphins again.



Since St. Augustine is about an hour from Disney, we decided to hit Disney Springs for dinner and a little shopping. Can't go to Florida without visiting Disney, right?





Before leaving the next day, we visited the Fountain of Youth - drank from the spring, and toured the area which was filled with peacocks! I think the girls liked that the best! Mama and Daddy continued to explore after we headed home. We got there just in time for Amber to pack up her school supplies and start her 10th grade year and to



decorate my parents' house!

Just before the Florida trip, Lee and I were trying to figure out vehicles. With Amber planning to get her restricted license this fall, she would need a car and a way to haul the horses (aka a truck). Piper needed a vehicle to take to college. So, Lee and I decided to get a new Prius for him to commute back and forth to work. We called around to every dealership (almost) between here and Orlando, gave them our requirements (including price) and most didn't want to deal. However, Leon Johnson at Sparks Toyota, down in Myrtle Beach, was willing to work with me over the phone. We worked out a deal and headed to the coast to pick it up. Then, while on the lot, we saw the car Lee had originally wanted - a Prius Prime (more electric with more "stuff" inside) with a price we couldn't refuse - so Leon worked a great trade on my Prius for that one and we came home with two new cars. Piper traded us her truck for the Highlander, and Amber received the truck. "Smoky" was a



good car; it was sad to suddenly part with him. But, we welcome "Ariel" and "Eric" to our vehicle clan.



While Amber was at school, Piper prepared some last items for her room at AU. Saturday, she had one last goodbye with the dogs and we headed up to Anderson University with two loaded vehicles! The "Move-In" crew at AU was amazing - all the stuff from our cars and from Eliana's cars (also two) were out of the cars and into the room in about 15 minutes (or less!). Then came the job of unpacking and placement - and once we were done, it was perfect! The girls were so happy with the way it turned out and they were starting to get to know their neighbors when we left for the evening.





We returned the next day for AU's traditional "Archway Walk" for the freshmen to begin their time at Anderson. They will retrace their steps as seniors at graduation - what a sweet tradition! We also enjoyed Sunday service on campus with Piper and ate lunch before leaving our baby to start her freshman year of college. She's with a class of 700 freshmen!



While waiting for the walk to start, Lee noticed something on AU's website - two positions that seemed to call my name. The most appealing for me was "Programming and App Development Professor." After he and I discussed it and I reviewed the requirements, I spoke to Piper about how she would feel about mom joining her at Anderson. She was excited about the possibility, so I applied for the position. After the interview process, I was made an offer. While I have been at PC for almost 14 years and enjoyed my time and colleagues here, I've been feeling a desire for a change for a little while and God has opened up a wonderful door for me. Starting in January, I will no longer be teaching at PC - I will be the new Professor of Programming and App Development at Anderson University. I look forward to this new opportunity and am very excited about it!



I was a little sad that I wouldn't get my "first day of classes" photo - for the first time in fourteen years! But Piper didn't let me down - she sent me a selfie! She started a rather ambitious schedule filled with Chemistry, Anatomy, Probability, Honors courses, and the AU 101 course. She was well prepared for time management with Hammond as her high school and her equestrian background. She has handled her first semester away from home pretty well.

As Amber started her 10th grade year, she also wanted to get some additional training for Fancy. We took her to Marbry Performance Horses in the upstate and Steven did a great job with her. Hearing Amber's aspirations to go to some NRHA shows, however, he advised that she may need a different partner for that level of competition. We started thinking about that.

Finally, as the month came to a close and Lee and I caught our breath a little, we wanted to give Mama and Daddy a dinner to celebrate their 50 years with their siblings. We met Aunt Nell, Kim, Aunt Jodie, and Uncle Howard at California Dreaming to celebrate their devotion to each other and had a wonderful evening. Piper was unable to come back (it being quite soon after she left), but we had a great time together, a wonderful meal, and enjoyed catching up with one another.



Anderson not being that far away, it was so nice to be able to keep up with Piper - since we were training with Steven and enjoying lessons with TR Potts in the upstate, we could meet Piper ½ way for dinner on Friday evenings. This was especially handy for her birthday! She loves it at Anderson and didn't come home a lot at first, but she took a seasonal position at Altered State in Columbia for the holidays, so we look forward to seeing a little more of her.

September brought Fynn's first birthday. He's still such a puppy! Amber continued training for her second degree black belt and achieved the Presidential award for her hours at the zoo. School started off strong in all honors courses and Fancy and Amber were both in reining training with Marbry Performance Horses. I was trying to keep Amber busy, as she missed her sister very much. She was also about to start her official driver training.



Amber started the IEA season with Creekside - bringing in a 4th place ribbon in her first IEA show since surgery. Adrian was pleased with her! Piper got to come and cheer her on! Then, she headed to another show with Flamekissed, bringing in two 2nd place ribbons in reining and a 4th in horsemanship. She's certainly back and ready to compete!



At the end of September, we headed to St. Andrews for Duke's first show. Piper loved seeing him and how well he was doing. He was great for his rider, bringing her a first-place ribbon. He was also happy to see us. Piper enjoyed riding him and warming him up and we enjoyed visiting with friends whose children are there.



October rolled around and with it came AU's Fall Festival and Homecoming. Piper came home during her Fall Break and we really enjoyed spending that time together as well. I was working, so she came to PC and we had lunch in Clinton at Jitters - highly

recommend that place - and it was so nice spending time with her! Piper's last day home, she let Amber drive her to lunch after church - San Jose - and teased her as any big sister would. The caption on her SnapChat read "I might die today - if I do tell the dogs I love them." Oh, my! Amber took it all with good spirits - she's turned into quite a good driver.



Fall also brought Parent's Weekend. It was so much fun to get to go up and meet Piper's friends and instructors. I was able to say hello to some of my future colleagues as well. AU treated us to a great lunch and a free t-shirt! It was fun to spend some time with Piper and Eliana. Piper's also been pretty good about sending me photos from time to time. Today's technology makes it so much easier to keep up with one another. I've enjoyed keeping up without feeling too intrusive - hearing a little about her days through texts. It's an adjustment when they leave home - but when they're happy and doing well, you feel you've done your job.



Amber's Fall Break was slightly off from Piper's, and included a Zoo



Intern day and a trip to the State Fair with me. Piper was Thursday/Friday and Amber was Monday/Tuesday, so we had a great weekend together and I got to spend some special one-on-one time with each of them. Amber even "won" (or I paid \$20 for) a huge stuffed animal we don't really need - that's what the fair is all about, right? We had our mandatory strawberry lemonade, corn dog, chicken, and elephant ears and went by to pet the bunnies and see the chickens and ducks before we headed home that day.



As Fancy's training time was coming to a close, Steven mentioned that a client of his was selling the perfect horse for Amber. Checking out the horse he showed us, we decided he might be right and we agreed to try her. After a trial and vet check, we added



"Spookaretta" (affectionately known as Spook) to our family! She is a beautiful red mare with a sweet personality and a great reiner. We brought her home with Fancy and Amber is back to riding two horses! Spook is actually related through her bloodlines to Duke, so it was nice to have her join our family. Piper got to meet her while we tried her and also loves this sweet red mare. Like Fancy, she has as sweet a personality.



For me, Halloween was a little sad - first one with NO ONE home - Piper celebrated at AU and sent me a photo with a cute little pumpkin. Amber celebrated with friends - and the weather kept the children from our home. We had one small little "Jasmine" come to our door. She got lots of candy!



Amber is the luckiest little thing! She entered an Instagram contest with Altered State and she WON! She was so excited and happy to get a box of their new beauty products in the mail. Thank you, Altered State!

Piper and her friends enjoyed some weekend adventures! Piper's college travels included an early morning trip to Max Patch with friends to watch the sun rise over God's beautiful mountains and marvel over the fall colors of the trees. It seemed like a cold and fun experience!



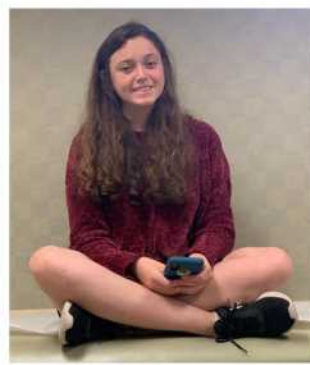


The same weekend Piper headed to the mountains, Amber decided to try her hand at an NRHA show. We took Fancy and Spook to Jacksonville, FL and Amber showed Fancy in the Green Reining classes and Spook in both the Youth and Green Reiner classes. She got points in both Youth and Green with great runs on both horses. We were so proud of her. Every time she took them out, she improved. We will probably only take Spook in the future to these shows (it's expensive to travel that far with two) but it was a great experience. Amber's looking forward to going to more of these shows in the future.



Another trip to Dr. Piehl showed that everything is still progressing well and Amber is now cleared to even bungee jump by her doctor - but not her Mama! ;) 11 months after surgery and she's doing so well. We are so very blessed.

The challenge in owning two horses is exercising two horses. They both want her attention and after she rode Spook and started with Fancy, it was clear Spook was a little jealous!



In SC, six months (or 180 days to be exact) after receiving your beginner's permit, one can get their restricted license. Amber started lessons with 10Zero Driving Academy. Billy Warren, company owner, started this driving school after 30 years as a state trooper where he observed first hand every type of problem there could be. He trained her so very well; not only did he teach the basics of parallel parking and three-point turn-around but he also took her through "Malfunction Junction" and Interstate traffic, changing lanes, various stop lights, and everything you can think of.

His motto is safety, safety, safety and he teaches them to look all around before making a move. We were very pleased and she was happy to get her restricted license to drive alone during daylight hours. At 16, it becomes a regular license.



She really couldn't wait to drive to school, but 30 minutes away through mostly horrible Interstate traffic had us a little worried; she took me through it several times like a champ and then, to her great delight, we let her drive. Lee drove behind her and she made it look easy. Over her first week, she was faced with great traffic, horrible traffic that took two hours to get home and one and a half hours to get to school (making her late one day), torrential downpours, and she navigated it all wonderfully. So proud!



November (and fall in general) also brought some challenges. In three months, Ariel (my new car) had three flat tires. I have NO IDEA what changed or where I am picking up nails all of a sudden, but I hope we have it figured out now.

I also wasn't feeling well, went to the doctor, had surgery, and came home. It was a tough day and a week before Thanksgiving - at least it didn't affect my courses too badly. What college student doesn't want an entire week at Thanksgiving?



I love hearing about Piper's adventures as she "tests her wings." She has enjoyed meeting and getting to know so many new people. Recently, she and some friends decided to go ice skating. Now, a few years ago, there was a skating rink at Disney (a Frozen celebration) and she was hopeless! Apparently, that has NOT changed; but I was proud of her for trying and she and her friends had a great time! She sends me photos from time to time - including one of where by new office will be. It's exciting!

Also, this summer, Mama and Daddy got a fun surprise - his name is "Mr. Bojangles" and we think one of his parents has to be "Patches" - they look so much alike. A couple of summers ago, they had another Koi born - "Sprinkles" but we suspect that, unfortunately, he lost a battle with a neighborhood heron. Bojangles has made it to a fairly good size through the summer - we welcome him! He's such a cute little fish!



So, having surgery a week before Thanksgiving kind of put a question mark on how to get the meal prepared - but Amber and Piper really stepped up, following my directions and getting things done. They did a great job - making cornbread and biscuit for the dressing, cooking the vegetables, combining ingredients for the sweet potato casserole - it was wonderful! Lee took care of the turkey and the puppies were very interested! We had Mama, Daddy, Mom and friend Clint over for a yummy meal and enjoyed a nice and quiet afternoon. Tired afterward, though.





And so we wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. We hope 2020 is good to you and we look forward to future adventures!

Merry Christmas!

Love,

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

