



2020
Meeker Family Christmas Newsletter
2020



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Merry Christmas, Everyone!

Well, 2020 was certainly a year many people would like to forget. Personally, we've had more loss of friends and family than any year in my memory. However, I like to look for and remember the good times – and there were also many good things that happened in 2020. Here is what happened with our year.

We certainly saw God's love for us throughout the year – in the good and bad times. And one thing was certainly made clear: **We must be ready at all times to meet our Maker.** Friends let me say, if you do not know Jesus Christ as your personal Heavenly Savior and God as your Heavenly Father, please have a conversation with me or someone else who does. You don't want to wait until it's too late. I believe God loves you. I believe He wants a relationship with you. I believe he cares for you. I believe that He wants you to follow Him. If you'd ever like to talk, please call me (803-463-1583). Call Lee (803-463-2065). Anytime. Day or night. Now, let's take a look back at 2020.



We ended 2019 normally enough – well, as normally as we could. I had decided to leave Presbyterian College and was busy packing up my office and making arrangements to move things to my new office at Anderson University. I had some sad goodbyes with colleagues and friends but was excited to set up my new office at

AU, located in the Rice building near the library and my classroom / lab. Have to say, I left PC with a (thankfully metaphorical) bang as someone called in a threat to campus on the last day of exams. Instead of seeing and saying goodbye to my students in a classroom, I met them off campus as they turned in projects or just via email as they suddenly needed to turn in exams and projects online. Should have seen that as a warning of things to come. What's happening to our world? I left some good people at PC and some special students, but I looked to the future at AU with much

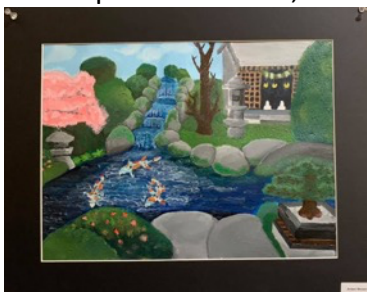
anticipation and excitement.

Amber participated in Hammond's art show and had some stunning work – the way the teachers bring out the kids' talent is amazing! She was encouraged to look into AP Art for her junior year and, I admit, I hadn't thought about it. However, the suggestion stuck as she considered classes for the fall

later in the year. She's in all Honors and AP coursework this fall (including

AP Art) and even taking an online class at AU. She's hard to keep still...

Both our IEA teams celebrated Christmas – Creekside at Rio's – the Brazilian Steakhouse. It's so nice to get together as a team of kids and parents and just relax! Flamekissed had a "broom ball" session which was hilarious as these talented kids tried to



hit a large ball with brooms while on horseback (and while convincing the horses this was a “good” idea...). Another nice meal with friends and games for all. It really set up the season.



As we approached Christmas, we had a plan in mind for something special. For a while, Lee and I had been wanting to get his family to Walt Disney World and Christmas seemed like a beautiful time to do it – Aunt Jeanette and Aunt Rachel met Mom, Lee, the girls, and I on Disney property and after getting settled in to the room, we had a “hotel hopping” fun time – Disney is so beautiful at Christmas! We ate at the Polite Pig (a new favorite) and used the new



Skyliner to move from Pop Century to the Beach and Yacht Club and the Boardwalk. We also visited the Grand Floridian and monorail resorts and enjoyed the live music, jaw dropping trees and life-sized gingerbread house. Of course, we visited the miniature village, life-sized gingerbread carousel, and enjoyed some delicious meals together.



After our return from our trip, we enjoyed family time around the tree at Mama and Daddy’s and at Mom’s. It is always nice to get to celebrate the season with family. Lee shocked me with a cool PacMan arcade game for Christmas! Little did we know how much we’d enjoy using it... We also had a quiet New Year’s Eve and Day, Amber and Piper riding Fancy and Spook and just staying home. Little did we know we were practicing for the better part of the next year...



January brought a trip to Charleston to visit my friend Jennifer. We headed to the Charleston Aquarium, enjoyed a carriage ride tour (and loved on our beautiful draft horse at the end), and shopped in the market.





It was so wonderful to catch up! As Jen loves sloths, we'd planned another trip near Easter to visit a place near there that rescues these lovable creatures. We always have so much fun together!



We also headed to St. Andrews for one of their shows and to visit our boy, Duke. He was doing so well! We made the tough (but not so tough after seeing how well cared for he was) decision to donate him to their IHSA program. We couldn't leave him in better hands than those of head western coach, Carla Wennburg. She and her staff still keep us up to date on how he's doing, and we're welcome to visit anytime.

I began my semester at Anderson University, where I was welcomed by my fellow faculty with open arms. I love my office, right near the library, and my students are



wonderful. I was teaching two introductory coding courses, one web development course, and a prototyping course. The students were engaged – all one can ask for – and I love being there. It was a good move for me and I'm very happy.



In January, Amber was inducted into Hammond's National Honor Society. Lee and I are so blessed! She's such a hard worker, keeping up in all honors course work while managing to exercise two horses (preparing one for showing) and working toward



her second-degree black belt. She has so many long-term goals for one so young.



The weekend of the MLK holiday, we took a trip to NC where Amber participated in her last IEA show of the season with Flamekissed, though we didn't realize it at the time. She competed well, achieving her points for reining and looking forward (and continuing to train for) regional finals and (we hoped) nationals in OKC.

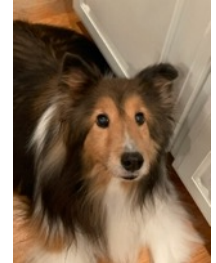


After getting her points on Sunday, she headed to our wonderful veterinary clinic on Monday where Dr. Brown and Dr. Foy have a program for high school students to shadow for the day. It's supposed to be a half day experience, but I got a call from her asking for lunch and to stay to the end of the day. Amber loved it! She wants to be a vet one day. We've been taking our animals to Sunset Animal Clinic now for almost 30 years. Wow.

Amber continued to practice with Spook as she prepared for her first NRHA show of the season, in Perry, GA, with the Heart of Dixie Reining Horse Association. She had a great show and was really excited. As much as she loves being a part of a team and our local AQHA shows, she told me that this show – with NRHA – is what she really wants to do. She loves reining and Spook is a great mare to work with.



January also brought Tango's 13th birthday. He's such a great dog! He is having some trouble with arthritis and can't get up and down very easily anymore, but always greets us with a tail wag and that wonderful Sheltie smile. He loves his annual birthday hamburger!



February opened with my birthday and Lee surprised me with some beautiful flowers, delivered to my office! Then, less than 2 weeks later, more flowers arrived for Valentine's day. He really spoils me! Meanwhile, Amber and five others were beginning the final process of preparation for their black belts. Most were training for their first; Amber for her second degree, and one other young lady for her third degree. They were given monthly dates when they would come in for



several hours on a Saturday to work, train, and practice test. Amanda Pope also had her team training hard for IEA Regional Finals but opened up the clinic to riders of other teams (what sportsmanship!) and Amber's friend Marci joined the group. It was a wet, rainy, but fun day together.



February also brought our first sad news for the year. Not a week after he celebrated his son's Eagle Scout award, a friend left this world for his final resting place. John Talkish and his wife Jan were in our Sunday School class for years and runners with Lee through Run for God. John was a police officer who always looked out for and protected the innocent and was a fighter, especially, for the victims, but a few years ago, he suffered a stroke and his health made it impossible to return to his work. He was such a kind and generous man. When Amber had her surgery, he came to see her in the hospital a couple of times and was such a joy to talk to. His smile would brighten a room and his kindness and caring for others was obvious to anyone who knew him. He left us too early – I'm so happy he



her in the hospital a couple of times and was such a joy to talk to. His smile would brighten a room and his kindness and caring for others was obvious to anyone who knew him. He left us too early – I'm so happy he

got to see his son's Eagle Scout ceremony; about a week afterwards, he was gone. Before COVID; before Andrew's graduation (postponed by COVID) and moving into Clemson, and a few months shy of his and Jan's 25th wedding anniversary. John was a light in our community, our church, and will be missed. Jan and Andrew continue to be in our prayers.

Amber was also going to her trainer's, Steven Marbry's, to work with Spook. After the January show, we had discussed it and moved Spook to his place. She and Fancy were a bit jealous of each other, Adrian had a waiting list for stalls, and Steven and Amber needed time together with Spook. Amber was working hard with her to get ready for the Florida Classic, a HUGE derby in Jacksonville, FL, just three weeks after the show in GA. It was a busy time – Amber even started driving to Steven's on her own as I couldn't get her and work in Anderson. Lee and I were nervous, but she handled it like a champion.



We headed down to Jacksonville for the show and it did not disappoint. Amber improved with each run and by the end



had won quite a few prizes and her first prize money! She was so excited, but I think her very favorite prize was a Florida Classic cheese tray! She also got to see some friends from her ranch riding days with ARHA who had also come to try an NRHA show. Steven is such an awesome trainer and he worked hard to get both Spook and Amber prepared and all that work really paid off. Amber got her first 70 (perfect score) in NRHA (quite an achievement!) and brought home



ribbons, wall hangings, beach chairs, money, saddle bags, horse grooming supplies, and (of course) her beloved cheese tray! It was a great show. We were looking forward to returning to Jacksonville in March.





Hammond also took Amber on her sophomore trip. As a college prep school, Hammond takes the sophomores to visit several colleges of various types and sizes, not to promote going to any individual school, but to introduce the students to what a college tour is like, what kind of questions to ask, and different types of schools: small liberal arts, large public universities, private



institutions, etc. She and her friends had a wonderful time going to Wofford, Clemson, Davidson, UNC, NC State, and Elon; six tours in three days, all the while learning how to research colleges and the application process.

We ended February with a small amount of snow for the season – nothing that actually stuck to the ground, but oh was it pretty as it came down. Just enough. So peaceful.



As March began, our church had its usual in-town retreat, Disciple-Now. This year, Piper was a leader and brought with her two friends from AU that were not members of our church; these two young men were great Christian leaders, and our church needed more guys in leadership.



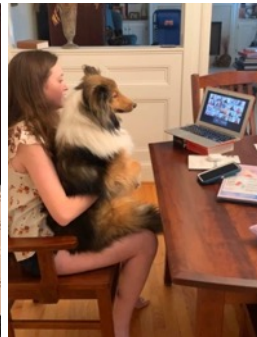
Piper and her roommate, Eliana, were also leaders; Eli led the group Amber was in! It's a wonderful retreat and I'm so glad the kids had it before the world shut down.



Lee had a minor surgery in March and had brought some equipment home from work so that he could work from home while he was recovering. In so many ways, we look back and see how the Lord was protecting and preparing us for what was to come.



Then came COVID. The world changed. Thankfully, leaders at Hammond and Anderson had been watching the virus' progression

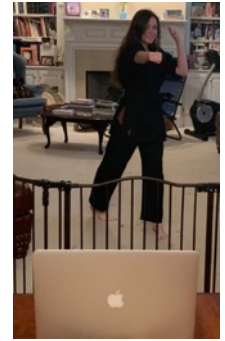


across the globe and had started preparing. As COVID-19 became a threat to the United States, schools, athletics, and any other large-scale events ground to a halt. For AU, and many other colleges, things got "real" over spring break. We extended the break for a week for the students as faculty scrambled to get their seated courses online in some sort of acceptable format. Meanwhile, Hammond never missed even a day; the Thursday and Friday before announcing going online, they pulled the students into training of a cool new app – "Zoom" and by Sunday, all families were told to

remain online until further notice with a schedule of classes. Apparently, they'd been training their faculty and preparing for a couple of months and the teachers did a great job. I got my courses online as well and was SO THANKFUL to God that I was at AU, who was well prepared with training and infrastructure for all faculty to go online. The students were great, though hugely disappointed to not be able to return to campus. As I prepared my classes to go online and Amber started her new home-Hammond schedule, Lee was also home working. Piper, that first week, was the only one without a schedule and was enjoying her morning coffee and relaxing as she prepared to go online the next week with her classes and hoped to return to campus before the end of the month.



After using Zoom myself, I suggested its use for our Sunday School as well as Amber's karate school, who started using it and ended up gaining students across the US as they took all their classes online to continue training. Our church went virtual as well – and we saw so many



more people enjoying the online services. Hammond tried to keep things as normal as possible, having virtual "red-shirt" Friday. Amber joined many of her friends in introducing their pets to the class; Fynn sat in her lap and the other three at her feet from 9-2 daily.



Amber's March show in Jacksonville was cancelled, but as her sport can be practiced socially distant (horses have to stay several yards away from each other for safety), she continued to go across the street to ride Fancy and once/twice per week to Steven's to ride Spook. IEA moved Regionals and kept Western Nationals on the calendars; we had hopes that things would improve in time for the competition, though there were concerns; Huntseat and Dressage National competition had been canceled; only



Western hung on since our competition was scheduled in June.



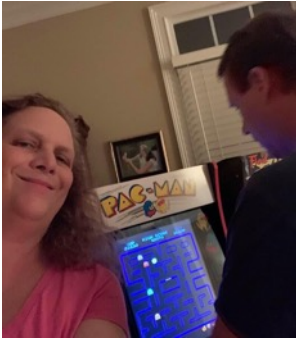
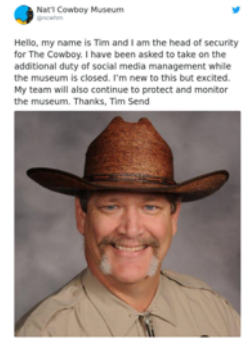
Amber's schedule actually got a lot easier, as she didn't have to drive everywhere, as did mine and Lee's. The ones who were most happy, though, were our dogs. Tango, Snowball, Oreo, and Fynn were delighted with the new arrangements and thrilled to have us home with them on a full-time basis. We decided to distance from non-family so that we could continue to enjoy time with Mama and Daddy and visit with Mom (unfortunately not as often due to the travel distance) safely and took all the precautions very seriously. We took walks through the neighborhood and enjoyed



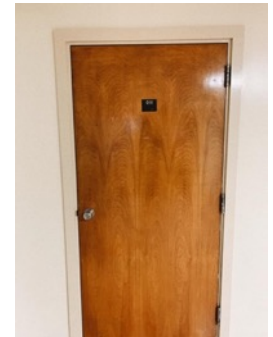
our yard, our flowers, and our newly found family time. I have to admit – I really enjoyed having everyone home and didn't miss the driving, the hectic schedule, and felt very blessed that Lee and I could continue to work, our girls could continue school, we could continue our worship, and Amber could continue both her sports. Lee didn't even have to go in to get equipment, since we had already brought it home to get through the recovery from his surgery.



We celebrated Snowball's 10th birthday with a birthday hamburger of his own. We also enjoyed following the National Cowboy's Museum's Twitter feed with #hashtagthecowboy giving us a smile and a laugh as they turned their social media over to their security guy, Tim. I ended up making a donation to them (it's a great place) and got a T-shirt for my efforts. I love it!



Turned out that Lee's surprise Christmas gift for me was a perfect distraction for when we started feeling "pen sick". He'd gotten me an arcade cabinet with Pac-Man – a favorite growing up! We ended up purchasing one other one with more games on it and really enjoyed reliving our teen years as we played several favorites and introduced the girls to a few of them. Piper thought it was so funny that in our very formal living room, we have two '80s style arcade cabinets.



The sad day came when Piper was told she would not return to campus for the spring and needed to move her things out of the dorm. Not the way we envisioned her freshman year ending. Lee, having had surgery, couldn't help us, so Piper and I headed to AU and got all her things out of the room. They joined the arcade cabinets in our living room, which was much more cluttered than usual.

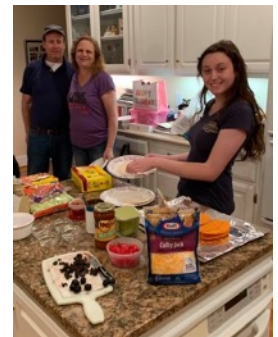


I loved having everyone home, I admit it. Things weren't too bad. Fynn and Oreo were very entertaining; Oreo, after being good at one meal and going in his crate received some chicken. Fynn wanted some and after going through all the tricks he knew, looked at Oreo in the crate and joined him – the last attempt to get our attention, I suppose. So, of course he got his chicken! Chicken was a precious commodity, though, as grocery store shelves emptied and everything from meat to toilet paper was rationed. And time began to pass.

As we entered April and our "new normal," I found myself attending meetings and speaking to students via Zoom in our living room while Lee used the office, Piper her room, and Amber the kitchen table. The dogs were nothing less than ecstatic that



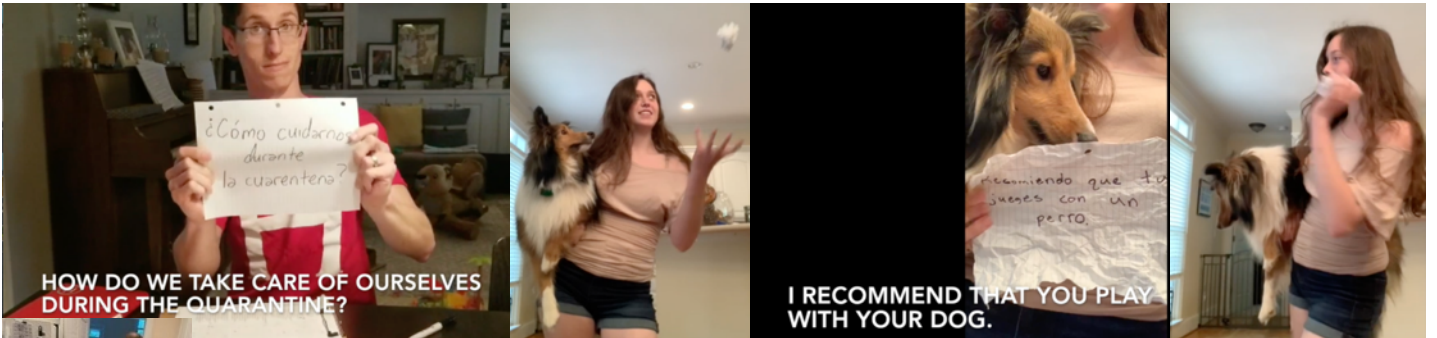
we were all home and we started to enjoy cooking our meals with whatever we could find at the grocery store that week, from taco nights to steaks, bbq and burgers to chicken, ham, bacon, whatever we could find!





The arcade games became a daily distraction, along with reading, preparing class work, and phone conversations with friends. Amber played some with her makeup and hair techniques while she exercised and worked hard with her horses and karate. We postponed our trip to see the sloths and had Easter at home (not unusual) but without our usual dinner guests.

Amber continued to ride Fancy and Spook according to new rules at the barns (making sure we were there when no one else was, touching only our own tack and grooming supplies, etc.) and we continued to enjoy God’s goodness – which included a beautiful full moon and lots of flowers bursting into bloom as Spring progressed. IEA canceled Western regionals and nationals and more and more equestrian events were removed from the calendars. IEA did have some fun challenges for their riders across all disciplines, though, and Flamekissed participated in the message challenge – creating a fun video and photo collage message. We had a “Zoom” meeting to get a “Brady Bunch” like montage of each team member looking around, then each one sent me video clips with a message – some alone, some with dogs, some with horses. Amber discovered that Spook was terrified of her cardboard message, but we got the video after convincing her there was nothing to fear! (I’ve put the video on Shutterfly if you want to see it. I also shared it on Facebook at the time.)



Many were employing this technique of engagement, including Amber’s Spanish teacher, who had each student send a short video of “recommendations to deal with quarantine” said in Spanish – they had to catch a ball of paper, unroll it, read their message and show it to the camera, and then ball it up again and toss. He patched together all the videos into a great short clip we really enjoyed.



As Easter approached, I loved seeing more and more people displaying crosses in their yards – since churches were all online (and thriving– Praise God!) the church courtyard floral cross that has become a tradition of so many was not allowed; a



family in our neighborhood put one up near the neighborhood pond and invited any who wanted to add their flowers to the cross. We did this as a family; Lee also used some lumbar we had and constructed a cross of our own which we decorated with a purple shroud and white Christmas lights with flowers at the base. It will be our new addition each Easter! We also put a red bow on our door – a symbol of the Passover – asking God to protect our family. Snowball enjoyed looking out the front door as more and more people walked by on the sidewalk, enjoying this time at home. Both Piper and Amber had also requested glasses to help with eye strain as they worked longer and longer hours on their computers.



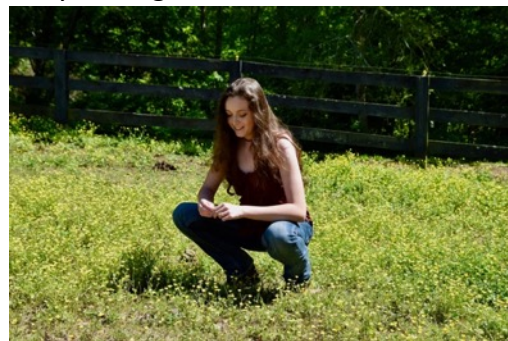
While our immediate family was okay, our extended family was not. Phillip Odom, a beloved cousin-in-law of my Dad's, came down with COVID-19. Both he and his wife, Sara. The crazy thing about this virus is that, while she did not have any symptoms, he was on a ventilator, fighting for his life. He was one of the first 60 people in SC to succumb to the virus, making it even more real for our family. He was also one of the first to receive plasma as a possible treatment and he was brave enough to allow the experiment. Because of his sacrifice, countless others have benefitted, and the plasma almost saved him as well. We are blessed that Phillip was a part of our family for almost 58 years of marriage to Sara and we will miss him terribly. He was a wonderful father to four cousins and grandfather to 15 more. He loved talking, sharing, and helping others. Phillip passed shortly after Easter and it's still hard to take it in.



April brought a special birthday to our home – Amber's "Sweet 16" – can't believe she's already 16! God has blessed us with such a beautiful, talented, smart, Christian young woman. We took some photos with Fancy and Spook to commemorate the occasion and her friends were so nice. Alysa made it a true "sweet 16" by sending a dozen doughnuts to the door. David and Kate Schelling also helped Amber's sweet tooth and sent six flavored Bundt cakes from TX. Adrian made her way across the street with riding friends to sing "Happy Birthday" from a social distance! Eliana brought Amber chocolate and flowers, and she received cards and gifts from family through the mail. It was a wonderful birthday.

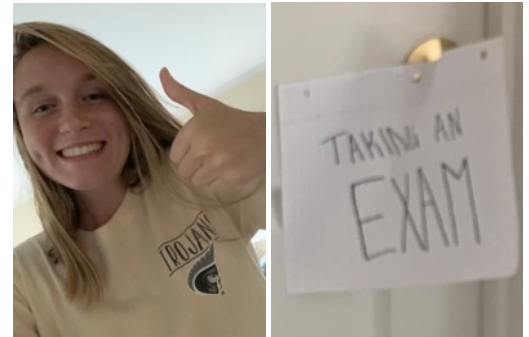


Instead of a party, she'd asked to take some friends to Disney and the trip was scheduled for the week of the fourth of July. She and her friends kept talking and making plans and I started to prayerfully wonder if it was going to happen.

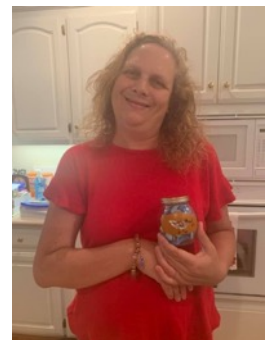


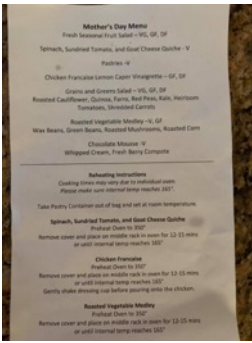


The end of April brought, as it normally does, college exams. Piper had a system for when she was taking one – she put a sign on her door, so we’d leave her alone for the 2.5 hours and she was happy to end the semester on a great note, with high marks in all her courses. She worked very hard and was ready for a break. However, high school continued for Amber and AU for me, as I was asked to teach some online courses during the summer months. It was so nice to feel wanted and it was helpful to me to further hone my online teaching skills. I began the first summer session in May and the second in July. Piper and Amber joined my course in July, so I had “face-to-face” time with two of my summer students! Amber really took to the course and decided to take the next one online this Fall.



May brought Mother’s Day and, to support Riverbanks Zoo, we purchased their “Mother’s Day Brunch” meal – Lee went and picked it up and cooked brunch that Sunday morning. It was delicious! The girls and I certainly enjoyed everything. There was a fresh fruit salad, spinach quiche, chicken Francaise lemon caper

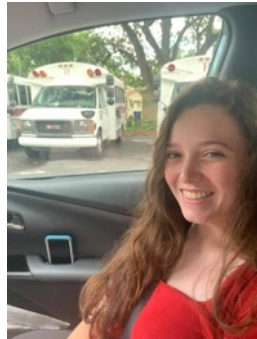




vinaigrette, quinoa and green salad, roasted vegetables, and chocolate mousse, served with sparkling grape juice. Piper gave me a beautifully painted jar with a sand piper holding cherries – our favorite drawing together as she knows it reminds me of her (Piper) and her sister (Amber Cherry). She filled it with handwritten Bible verses folded, origami like, into butterflies! For the longest time I was afraid to unfold them to



read, not knowing if I could fold them back! Not to be outdone, Amber created a beautiful bracelet made from beads she made from designing paper, printing it, and rolling it, then covering it with a protective coating and adding a charm. I am so blessed with such talented daughters!



As Amber approached the end of her sophomore year and exams, she also finished strong. In fact, she really did shine with her online course work – I always suspected she'd be happy and do well online. The "last day of school" pic this year wasn't in front of the chapel but in the car, driving by, dropping off her laptop and getting the few things left behind in March while waving at teachers in face shields and masks.



Amber was disappointed to learn that her internship with Riverbanks Zoo (this would be her third summer) was suspended due to COVID. While they still met virtually, they were together in person from February to November and did not work the summer hours at the zoo that Amber loves so much.

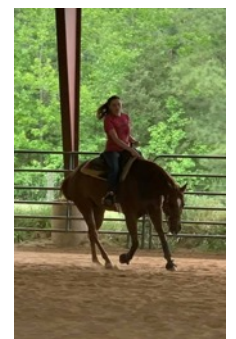
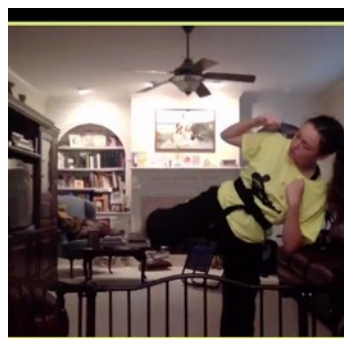


Not one to sit still, she immediately contacted the Carolina Wildlife Center. She'd always wanted to volunteer there, but never had the time. She applied to their program, received her recommendation letters from her Hammond teachers, and was accepted as a teenage worker to help injured native animals be rehabilitated and reintroduced to their habitats. As a minor, she was not allowed to work with anything that could contract rabies or directly with birds (they are very delicate), so she mainly worked with opossums and turtles/tortoises, but also the occasional bunny. She would clean their enclosures, make their meals, and do their laundry (making sure all the linens were clean) and she loved every minute of it. She'd also make meals for the birds. They aren't allowed to handle the animals there – don't want them too familiar with humans, but she did get to hold one of the education opossums for a quick photo for me. Some animals that can never be safely released are used for education and act as ambassadors for their kind – teaching school



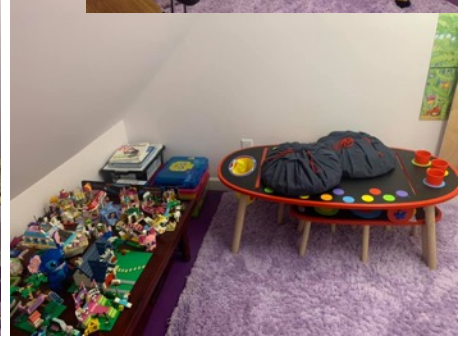
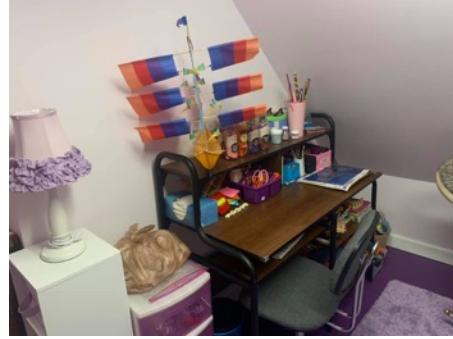
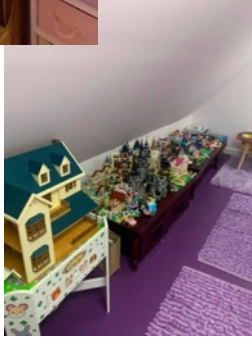
children and others how important they are to our environment.

With all this, Amber continued to ride Spook and Fancy as well as zoom into her classes at BGr8 ("Be Great") Martial Arts. In her "spare time" she was organizing her room and her "Purple Place," making it a better teen hangout. By the end of the summer, after getting her Dad to



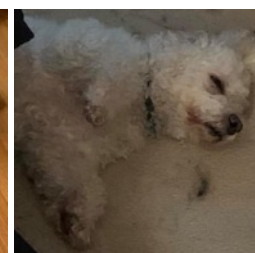
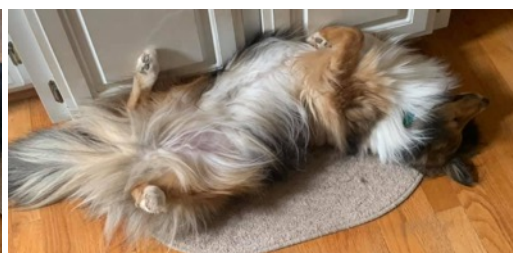
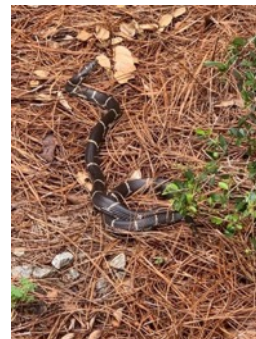
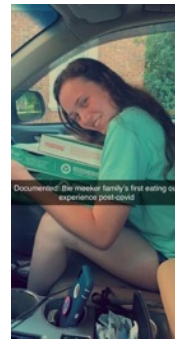


create some built-in shelves, it looked amazing. I may consider hiring her out... after she helps me organize all the closets in the house! She missed seeing her friends in person and kept planning, hoping, and praying that the planned Disney trip would happen. She also completed a mini-Stitch lego project, just for "funsies" as she says!



Another thing that kept us busy was a purchase of a soft serve ice cream maker. This was fun and let us add various toppings to our inventions. We also enjoyed watching Bindi Irwin's wedding on Animal Planet. Having loved the message her father, Steve (The Crocodile Hunter) of animal conservation, we have watched Bindi and her brother Robert grow through the years through the media and I must say, she seems to be a lovely young woman with a big heart. I wish she and her husband Chandler the best. We also had our first "eating out" experience post-COVID with Papa John's breaking through to the house. We enjoyed

more wildlife in our yard, with a friendly king snake making an appearance to sun near our front porch for quite a while. Being able to Zoom her meetings allowed Amber to travel and Zoom with the Zoo Teens in the car. It was nice – the dogs relaxed into summer, and periodically the girls would just crack themselves up for no apparent reason. So much smiling!





We also decided to take a socially distanced trip to AU – Piper and I both missed the campus and the grounds staff had made it so beautiful! Mama



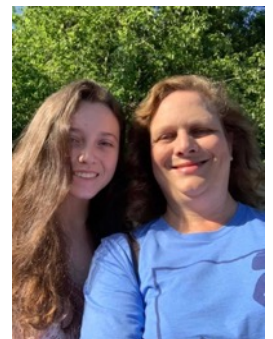
and Daddy traveled with us – we were all eager to get out a bit – and we got take-out from J. Peters and ate at a picnic table near the student center. It was wonderful to walk around campus, see where Piper's dorm was to be for the fall, and enjoy the beauty of the



campus. Even "Reepicheep" was being considerate of others and wearing a mask for the safety of all. ☺



We also got to go and visit Susan – for a much-needed hair touch up. She's been my hairdresser since I was a teenage and she does an amazing job. The shutdown was difficult for her business, and she opened up with every precaution in place.



We got word that Disney was going to reopen – July 10th. Six days after our originally planned trip. I hopped online to see if new reservations were even possible as soon as I heard and it was meant to be - the same

location, the Cabins at Fort Wilderness, was available for the 15th – the 19th. I booked it hoping her friends could still travel with us and the website slowed to a crawl... before I could add any additional plans to the new reservation, we were confirmed and locked out. Disney had halted everything until those with existing reservations were taken care of. We were waiting again and not at all sure we should even pursue it as virus numbers rose around us.



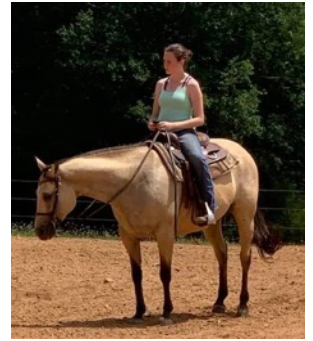
With June, Amber, Lee, Piper, and I discussed it and decided that since we were home anyway, taking a college course online might be a smart way to go. Both girls decided to take my July coding introductory course to learn to make apps. Amber was really excited; Piper – not so much; but I convinced her it was cool to make apps. Our sweet Oreo turned six years old with his celebratory birthday hamburger, and we enjoyed a nice



Father's Day with a grilled meal and Mama and Daddy. We also were able to sneak down to GA, which had reopened its borders, for a lesson with Amanda at Flamekissed. It was nice to see her again.



Piper was excited to begin working more often at Debra Wright’s barn in Abbeville. She learned so much this summer! She also earned some money and used a bit of it to buy a ukulele. She was so excited when it arrived! I helped her get it tuned and she began teaching herself the chords. Over the summer, she got quite good. She’s so cute when she’s so excited! With Piper working there and a plan for Fancy to join Duke at college this fall on the St. Andrew’s IHSA Equestrian Team, we moved Fancy to Debra’s and Amber got to go to help Piper sometimes and ride a bit.



In the meantime, the Heart of Dixie Reining Horse Association was determined that their June scheduled show would happen. Other shows in GA were opening up and running, but the fairgrounds, where the HDRHA was to be held, would not allow the show. Competitors eager for a show started making near-by suggestions and the HDRHA secured the South Carolina Equine Park for the show. This was great news for us – much closer, no hotel to worry about, and some of Amber’s friends that had never shown NRHA before could attend and try it out.



It was our families first time out since March, and it was so nice to get to see friends and compete with our horses. We had cookouts on the show grounds and purchased “Slidin’ out of Quarantine” t-shirts. It felt SO GOOD to be outside; it felt more normal. Since the SCEP is an outdoor facility, we socialized with others for the first time in several months. Amber and Spook loved seeing all their NRHA friends, like Jada and Emmerson, Kirsten and Evie as well as AQHA friends Jenna and Marci as well as McKinney, Addie, and Ava; Piper got to see some old friends also, as Maegan, Bailey and Sarah joined the show.



Such a welcome time; after the show, as a precaution, for two weeks we checked temps and watched closely for symptoms and were thankful none came.





Also, in June, Amber completed her test for her second-degree black belt. She worked hard, endured, and made it! We are so very proud of her! Her tenacity and courage have really shown through! Master Siokos held the test – it was the first one that Mr.

Jerry had missed from yellow to 2nd degree. We didn't think anything of it at the time – times were so strange.



We attended the outdoor belt graduation that Saturday and one person was noticeably absent – Mr. Jerry. Mr. Jerry had started she and Piper as white belts, given them their first-degree test, and until a couple of weeks before,

been very present in all Amber's online classes and in person work. We thought he may be on vacation, but the afternoon after the presentation of the belts (he'd never missed a graduation), we received word that Mr. Jerry had had a crazy fall in his home and had passed away a couple of days before. Such a shock. We all loved Jerry – such a kind and talented man. It is a huge loss for our area, and he is sorely missed. It is still rather difficult to take in.



Amber had also been thinking about her fall schedule and went to speak to Mr. Lumpkin (Hammond's high school headmaster) to plead her case for giving up a study hall for AP Art. Mr. Lumpkin and I both wondered if it was a good idea to lose a study hall – junior year is so important, and she must keep up her GPA for those college applications – but she loves art and talked us into it. She was thrilled it was on her schedule with AP Biology, AP Language, Honors Pre-Calculus, Honors History, Honors Spanish IV, and a second Swift coding class through AU's online program. Whew!



June 30th, AU was having a blood drive. The girls (of course) had never given but neither had I. Lee had not given in years. We decided to give – to save a life. There was such a huge need. We drove to Anderson and signed up for the blood bus. The nurses put cotton over the needle prick and a band around us (as usual) and since Amber was the youngest, they made a bow on hers. 😊

After giving, Piper, who finished first, was about to hop out when the nurse stopped her to give her some cookies and water. She sat down to eat/drink and then slowly sank in the seat. I could see her and called for the nurse, who helped her get back to a seat she could lay down on. She had almost passed out. I fared no better, actually passing out. Amber, however, a champion by now of letting nurses know when there's a problem, asked for a cold pack and something to drink/eat and didn't have a problem. They didn't even let Lee try – giving him stuff before he got up. When we felt okay, we went to J. Peters for a steak, broccoli, and potatoes. All was okay until the end of the meal, when Lee and I passed out again. Our very worried children didn't want us driving two hours back home! I evaluated them and Amber, who hadn't passed out at all, won the "who gets to drive" game and drove to Newberry before her head started to hurt. She pulled over and Piper took us the rest of the way home. Never again will all of us give at the same time... and then have to drive that far... Live and learn. We were told our blood donation would help 12 people that day – a wonderful feeling!



As the end of June approached, Disney opened up their plans for park reservations, limited numbers, no dining plans, and all dining reservations canceled (and you could rebook). The morning reservations could be made, I was on hold for over two hours while the system came up; then, found it quite easy to rebook everything and more. Then, the question became – should we go? Amber’s friends’ parents were as uneasy as we were as we decided to wait and see – Disney was amazing and promising that full refunds would be issued with no questions asked up to the day of arrival and then partial refunds if we felt the need to leave after that.

Seeing that many of our favorite quick-service venues were not going to be open, I booked some table service locations for our party of six. Amber’s favorites – the Rainforest Café, Yak and Yeti, Whispering Canyon Café, and TaToria Al Forna. Then, added the Sci-Fi Dine Inn and the Jungle Navigation Company. We also planned on visiting the Polite Pig and the Sa’tuli Canteen. I had reservations into the Magic Kingdom, Animal Kingdom, and Hollywood Studios. Every plan we wanted fell into place and we watched as friends went to the recently opened Universal and raved about the safety protocols and low crowds. We watched the percentages of virus counts as well as the opening of Disney hotels and Disney Springs to guests. This was followed by opening the parks to cast members and Passholders before opening to guests with reservations. All seemed okay. While Florida’s numbers looked high, the percentage with population was about the same as South Carolina (for good or bad). After many discussions with each other as well as the parents of Amber’s friends, we decided to take the trip. July 15th, we headed to Walt Disney World to celebrate Amber’s 16th birthday, masks and cleaning supplies in hand.

Mom made sure we’d be safe in our travels as well as fashionable by making us several masks; Solid colors, Animal, Horse, and Disney themed, to use on the trip. Perfect!

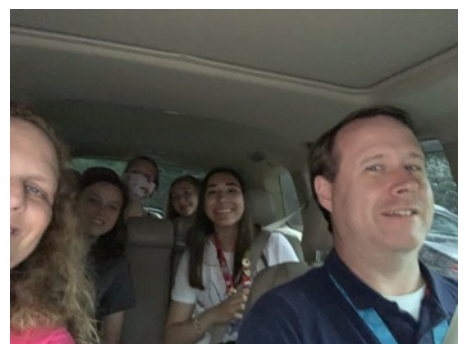


We needn’t have worried – Disney was amazing! It was one of our best trips yet. Disney had enhanced cleaning of the cabin we were staying in, though I actually went behind them and “re-cleaned” when we arrived – spraying the last of my Lysol (still can’t find it) and wiping down surfaces. I placed hand sanitizer and our own soap about the cabin and put “grabbable” food for quick breakfasts and snacks for backpacks out on the kitchen table and counters. We planned to grab heavy snack-like breakfast foods each morning and then eat in the parks. It was Marci’s first trip and Amber and Alysa were so excited to show her Disney!

When we arrived, we did some shopping at Disney Springs and enjoyed lunch at the Polite Pig and dinner at the Rainforest Café. Everyone had their temperature checked upon arrival before being allowed in and mask wearing was strictly enforced. We left in time to settle in at the cabins to prepare to go to the Magic Kingdom the next morning. We’d decided to drive to each of the parks instead of taking



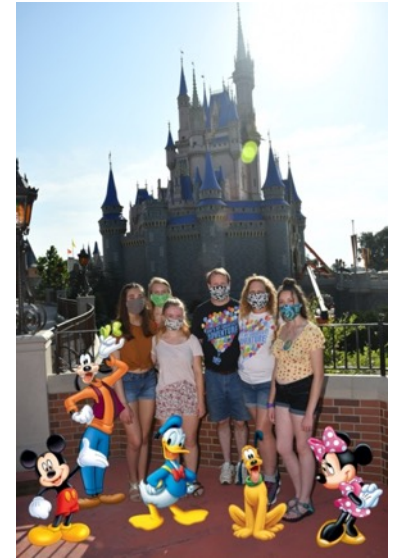
Disney transportation to minimize close contact with other guests and it worked out well for us



(even though we got lost driving on property a couple of times – signage there is confusing!).



We weren't sure what to expect but were pleasantly surprised – while warm, the masks weren't bad at all once we got used to them and we LOVED that there were really no lines for anything. In the Magic Kingdom that day, we started with Splash Mountain, then Thunder Mountain (twice) then Splash



again. Then, the Haunted Mansion took our attention, followed by Space Mountain and then we helped Buzz Lightyear overcome Zurg! We then headed to the Jungle Cruise and Pirates of the Caribbean; then stopped to eat at the Jungle Navigation Company. We had to take Marci on some traditional



Fantasy Land rides – Small World, Dumbo, Little Mermaid, and the Seven Dwarfs Mine Train. The girls raced on the Tomorrowland Speedway and then we re-rode so many again. I think there were at least 4 or 5 rides on Space Mountain alone! We closed the park (closing early at 7 with COVID restrictions) and then drove to the Whispering Canyon Café for dinner and headed back to our cabin. We've NEVER



ridden that many rides in a trip – let alone a single day. While we missed the parades and fireworks, we had a blast. That was our “Disney Princess” day when the girls all dressed as a princess – Amber was Belle, Alysa Pocahontas, Marci was Sleeping Beauty, and Piper was Lilo's sister Nani.



The next day, we repeated that experience in Animal Kingdom, enjoying the Sa'tuli Canteen and Yak and Yeti between Flights of Avatar, Navi River Journey, Safari Ride, Kali River Rapids, Dinosaur, etc. However, Expedition Everest – a long anticipated favorite – was not working that day. We were so disappointed; however, an amazing cast

member was SO kind and worked it out so that on our last day we could come in before our scheduled breakfast and ride it before leaving FL. The girls loved not only all the rides but the beautiful animals as well. We left Animal Kingdom and headed back to the cabins.



Our third day was spent in Hollywood Studios, where we experienced our only “wait times” of the entire trip. HS had the newest rides – Mickey and Minnie’s Runaway Train and the Rise of the Resistance. We joined the virtual queue for “Rise” at 10 – within two



minutes – and we were in the 45th group scheduled for the day! We hopped in line for the Runaway Train but had a 45-minute wait. Piper offered to hop out of line to grab some waters for us. She took a food/drink order and went around the corner. We waited awhile and I was starting to wonder... then I saw her coming; weaving through the line (where everyone stayed masked and 6 feet away from each party). Apparently, the kiosk she’d stopped at didn’t have bags. She happened to be wearing her overalls that



day, so my smart and ingenuitive daughter put a water in one pocket and a water in the other; she clipped a popcorn bucket to her belt loop. She tucked 2 of the other waters in the bib of the overalls and held a pretzel and the last two waters in her hands as she made her way to us. She said when she asked for a bag, they felt really bad but didn’t have any; everyone in line cheered when she found a way to carry it all!

We enjoyed all the rides we wanted – riding Slinky Dog and Rockin’ Roller Coaster several times each, playing Toy Story Mania, and experiencing almost every option of rider in the Millennium Falcon. We had a delicious lunch at the Sci-Fi Dine Inn and were anxiously awaiting a call back for Rise of the Resistance. It was 6:30pm before our turn came, but OH MY was it worth it! Disney really outdid themselves with that one! We left and headed back to the cabin to pack

our things (except for what we’d need the next morning) to be able to enjoy Expedition Everest before breakfast at the Boardwalk and heading back to SC.



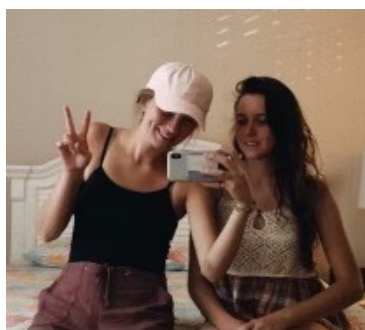
The next morning, we still couldn’t believe our good fortune as we entered Animal Kingdom and headed for the girls favorite ride – I think they rode it five times; Lee and I gave up after two... and then we went to the Boardwalk and Tratoria al Forna for a delicious brunch. We enjoyed a brief walk around and said goodbye as we got into the cars and headed back. It was an amazing trip and the first time we’d actually relaxed and felt safe since March. Everyone was wearing masks, everyone was temperature checked, no one was taking advantage, and everyone stayed 6 feet or more apart. There was hand sanitizer at the entrance and exit of every attraction and gift shop or store and hand washing stations throughout the parks. The masks weren’t even felt by us toward the end of the trip and we had an amazing time. I was so thankful Lee and I could give



this to Amber for her birthday! While we couldn't do character experiences and autographs, as we'd see characters wandering through the parks, they'd "photobomb" selfies when they saw you trying to get a quick pic with them in the background. The Photopass photographers helped make some great memories, too. It was a great trip.

Disney went over the top to make sure our trip was amazing – from finding Amber's long sought missing vehicle transportation system card (the only one she couldn't find) and placing it in the room when we arrived to birthday cards signed by Mickey, to welcome first guest card for Marci, to extra nice people, fun Photopass encounters, and ending with extra time in AK to be able to get to

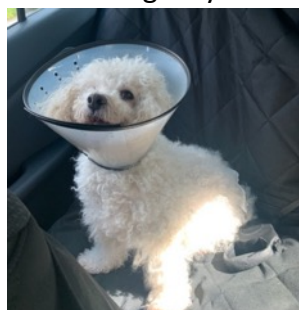
that last favorite ride, they really did it right. We even ended on a high, as she chose Tratoria Al Forna because she LOVED their chocolate croissants; however, we were unaware that those only come with character breakfasts (which they weren't doing) and they didn't have any. The waitress left us, went to the bakery down the way, and got her TWO – one for there and one to take home, when she heard it was her birthday. How very special!



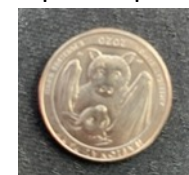
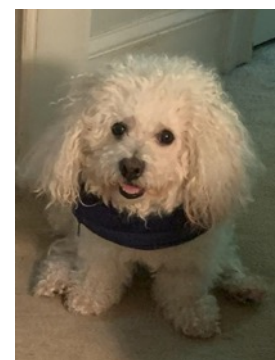
On our return, my parents and Aunt Nell and Kim were leaving for their annual two weeks at Garden City Beach. I was worried – but it was a family beach with many people also maintaining that social distance. However, their usual activities



were curbed, and they mainly just enjoyed the beach. Wildlife was plentiful there as well, and we saw lots of dolphins closer than usual as well as some sharks (I think they were nurse sharks) close to shore. We had joined them for a day and planned to stay a bit longer but had a little emergency of our own. Our dear, sweet little



Snowball had become ill – unable to go to the bathroom. We took him to the vet to discover he had bladder stones – blocking him – and he had to have surgery. Being the little rascal that he is, he had a hard recovery, opening his stitches and fighting the "cone of shame" and the doughnut we replaced it with to help him, tearing at the bandages and stitches, and causing all sorts of trouble as we tried to keep him from hurting himself until he could heal. **He's lucky he's cute.** He's also lucky we have such great veterinarians. As of this writing, he's recovered but still has two stones inside that they couldn't get; we hope will pass on their own. Currently, he's back to his mischievous (expensive) self.



Well, we weren't sure if we could fulfill Amber's usual quarter collection this year – before COVID struck, one of the quarters back contained a picture of a bat, which of course became very popular to try to obtain. Well, one day in August, the quarter we couldn't find was given to us in change! She was so happy!

Because of a busy Western schedule, we felt that we didn't have time to properly devote to Adrian's IEA Creekside team, so we decided that we would not do Huntseat IEA this year; however, this opened up the opportunity for Amber to join Hammond's SCISA only Huntseat team. She's missed being a Hammond athlete so much and she's excited to join the Huntseat team and ride for her school. Hammond's Western team has changed so much, and this year has left IEA. While it was difficult, we made the right decision to move her to a different coach. In addition to riding for her school, Amber has rejoined the Flamekissed Western IEA Team with Amanda Pope as Coach and intends to continue to show Spook with Steven Marbry in the NRHA. Busy girl!



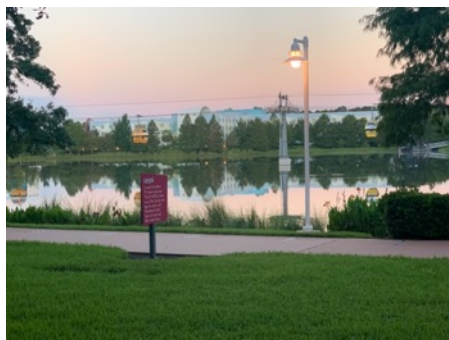
Fancy made her way to St. Andrews and settled in very well. It was so hard to leave her, but easier knowing how well cared for the horses are there. Duke looked great and happy to see us and we saw some other horses we knew there as well; many people choose to lease or donate their horses to



Coach Carla Wennburg's well run program. We plan to bring Fancy back home next summer to love and enjoy before she returns for the season.



Since shopping at the beach was basically a "no-go" and that's one of Mama and Aunt Nell's favorite activities there – just to get out – we thought a great "anniversary" or "Christmas" idea would be to go back to Disney – we



felt very comfortable there with temperature checks before anyone was allowed in and masks required. Of course, you can get it even then, but you can't stop living; you can just take precautions. We tried to plan a trip for August but Kim could not go. I replanned it for December (and am excited!) but then found that the original plans (August) were still in effect. So, Mama, Daddy, Amber and I headed to FL where Lee joined us on the weekend. Piper was working, as was Kim. We had a great time enjoying the Grand Floridian Café and Disney Springs. The animal sculptures made of

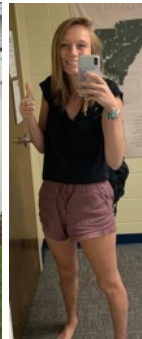
chocolate were AMAZING in their detail. It was hotter than in July, so we stayed in temperature-controlled stores and had



early nights back to Pop Century. It was a nice way to spend the last weekend before school started back. Lee and Piper took care of little Snowball and the views were so beautiful. It was busier than in July but not as busy as usual. We had a great time.

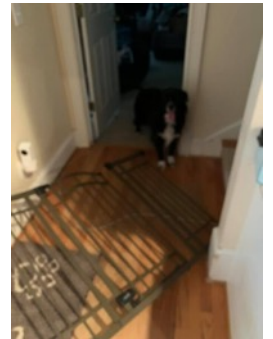


Then, the day came that our dogs were all dreading. Piper moved back to AU (she was SO excited), Lee went back to working on site, and Amber and I started school on the same day. I had some “new faculty” and “normal faculty” meetings, so for the first time, I didn’t get to take my “First day of school” photo. However, not sure I’m supposed to be on campus anyway. Amber had her friends take the picture and texted it to me! She knows me so well. (and... I reminded her a couple of times!) I am enjoying being back on campus with my students. I have two



classes online and three were hybrid. All my lectures and/or material are online for them to review and in class is reserved for questions and lab time. It’s an interesting flipped semester for me.

Oreo had it the worst – he was SO upset



when we were no longer home. Those soulful and sad brown eyes made us feel so bad. During an afternoon thunderstorm, he took down the dog gate to search the rest of the house for us. Found him curled up behind our pillows on our bed. Poor little fellow!



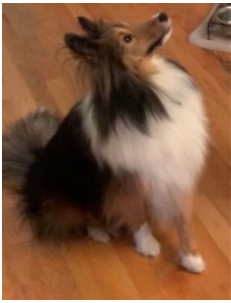
One reason Piper was so excited about getting back to school was that she’d been “e-dating” a young man from Clemson since mid-summer. She was excited to meet him in person and they’ve really hit it off. Then, much to Lee’s concern, Amber received a text from a young man she’d worked with at the wildlife center. What’s a dad to do? He has two beautiful ladies who have found two very nice young men to spend time with. Both of them are really happy. Where has the time gone? Are they really old enough to date?



As we entered September, another NRHA show was coming up for Amber; this one, we wanted to use as a schooling show so that she’s really ready in October for the Regional Affiliate Finals. We were also waiting with great anticipation to meet Steven and Sabrina’s baby, Bristol Rose, who decided she did not really want to make her appearance on time! (Poor Sabrina!) Little Bristol was born on September 15th, and is SO BEAUTIFUL and SWEET!

Steven is certainly a proud papa, and Haley is an amazing big sister. She came right before the show, which was also a successful one for Amber and her friends and she really enjoyed getting to see everyone. Logan and his dad also joined us at the horseshow to watch, meet Amber’s “baby” (Spook) and her friends. She was so excited he came!





September brought little Fynn his two-year birthday. Our puppy is officially an adult dog – but not really... he’s such a mess! All the dogs celebrated with another birthday hamburger. It also brought an unexpected surprise – Mrs. Betsy, Carrie’s mom, had a friend who was making masks with a beautiful horse design. She sent us three and Piper, Amber, and I love them.



September 23rd brought Piper’s 20th birthday and the 27th brought Lee and my 23rd wedding anniversary. We got together in Anderson for a fun dinner and some ice cream and got to meet Piper’s fellow, John, in person. What a nice day! At the end of the day, we found a little lizard that wanted to jump on Amber’s shoe for some reason. John got him, the girls held him, and Piper released him in a safe place. Fun!

However, the end of September brought more sadness for us; our hearts broke for our friend. Susan Boone has been my hair stylist since I was a teenager and she was just starting her own business. Through the years, she’s been such a wonderful friend to our family – even coming to my parents’ home to do Mama’s hair when she was too frail to go herself (sickness or surgeries through the years). I love Sue’s work so much that I still travel to her to do my hair, though I’m no longer in Camden. Mama and Daddy do as well. She had been more than careful, closed her business for over 3 months, and followed every rule and protocol. However, her uncle became ill with COVID and her mother (who lives with her) had visited. Her mother came down with it, as did her aunt, Susan, and her husband David and 7 other family members. Susan lost her aunt, uncle, and husband in less than two weeks, while she and her mother also battled the virus. David Boone was one of the most caring men I’ve had the pleasure of meeting and the love of Susan’s life. They were married 37 years and he worked hard in his church and for his family. He was so devoted to Susan, his children, and grandchildren. When he wasn’t at his job, we’d often see and talk to him at Susan’s shop, where he helped her so much. COVID is such a horrible disease. David will be sorely missed.



October opened with a celebration – 2020 Commencement for Anderson University! These seniors had to wait to celebrate since we were unable to hold the ceremony in May, but it was well worth it. Most of the class was able to return October 2nd and it was a wonderful celebration. The seniors were led down the street through the Archway by a Trojan on a white horse as the faculty watched and cheered them on. Parents and families were physically distanced, and the students walked across the stage to receive their diplomas. I was honored to be asked to deliver the

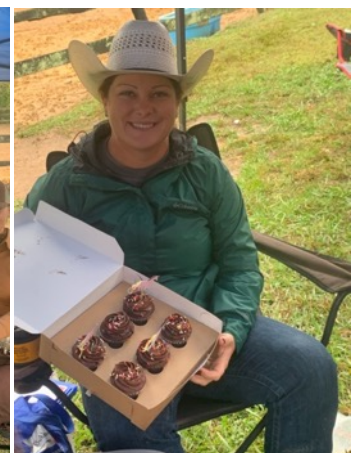


Benediction (closing prayer) for the graduates. What a blessing. The seniors also

received a special treat – during exams, Mrs. Whitaker, the wife of the president, bakes each student a chocolate chip cookie. Last spring, the students missed their cookie; not wanting the seniors to miss their last cookie, each senior received a specially wrapped homemade cookie with their graduation program.



October brought Amber's first IEA show since January and she was so happy to be with her team and her coach. She did really well, riding a tough horse to a second place in reining! She also received a sixth place in horsemanship; she did it all without me, as when I went to take her to the showgrounds, I discovered my tire was flat as a pancake. Being in TN and not knowing the area, I was so grateful to our friends Laurie Muldrew and Jeannie Woody who looked out for her and our amazing coach, Amanda Pope for all the guidance! It was Amanda's birthday, too. AAA to the rescue – I got a tow; however, with COVID, I was not allowed to ride with the driver and

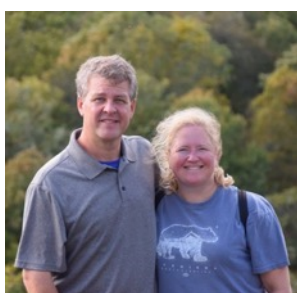
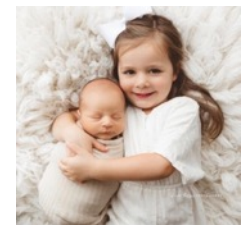


the courtesy cars of the tire repair shop didn't run on weekends. Everyone was so nice – the tire folks offered to "find a way" but the tow driver told me I could ride in my actual car on the back of the flatbed. Made me nervous, but it worked – I was delivered with the car, the tire was replaced (fifth one since 8/2019), and I ended up back at the showgrounds just after Amber finished her last ride. While getting the tire fixed, I saw a "Central Park" – my grandmothers favorite fast food stop! Amber and I grabbed a bite there before heading back to SC and it made me smile to think of her! Amber LOVED their cheese sticks!



October brought more sadness, this time from our old barn. In mid-October, I heard that a friend, Monique Lee, had passed away. Monique was such a kind person and always tried to see the bright side of things and had the most beautiful smile. Three years ago, her daughter Millie, along with Amber and Marci were the IEA Middle School Championship Team. She had battled a long illness and I prayed for her frequently but did not know she was as sick as she apparently was. We had lost touch over the last year or so. She leaves behind two young girls. She was such a sweet person and I will miss her.

While 2020 has brought so much death, it also brought rays of sunshine; the same day I heard about Monique, I learned another friend had become a grandmother a second time and she welcomed her grandson, Graham, into the world. God brings rainbows with every storm. So happy for my friend Laura Kirkland – she has a beautiful family!



2020 also brought the 25th wedding anniversary of our dear friends, Todd and Carrie. We have been blessed to know them 16 of those years and we wish them all the best. True friends are hard to find. We've had so much fun together through the years and even though we now live several states apart, it's nice to know we're here for each other.



So many changes this year... the way we socialize, teach, worship. October brought a change to the SC State Fair! No rides or games; however, a free drive through of the exhibits and favorite fair food vendors was the order for the day. I left work right after my office hours, grabbed Amber, and we headed downtown to get our annual elephant ears and cotton candy. We approached the grounds around 6:20 and slowed to a crawl (expected, right?) as we worked our way to the gate. I'd hoped to get our food, then drive through the exhibits. Went to the wrong gate – the exhibits – but didn't get close to it until 7:30 – and the grounds

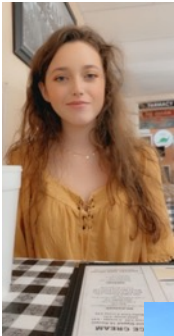
closed at 8! So, they allowed us to sneak over out of that line and into the next one to get to the food vendors. We crawled toward the corner and I joked to Amber that it would have been faster to ride Spook! No kidding, not 15 minutes later, three people jogged by us on horseback! Now, I would not promote riding three horses through heavy traffic, but they DID pass us... Only in South Carolina...



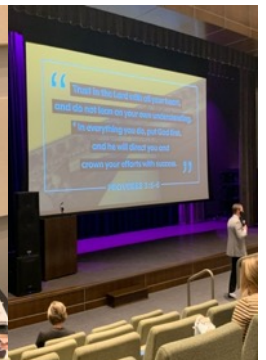
We got to the entry gate to the fair grounds at 7:59. Then, we started a serpentine line to reach the vendors, that I *couldn't see yet*. We drove down and back horizontally 10 times; then vertically another 10 (I could see the vendors!) then horizontally again another 4 – it was crazy! Guess South Carolinians love their fair food. Finally reached the point of entering a vendor line and was directed to line 5 (there were 7 with different vendors). Not the vendors we normally would choose and we were STARVING – it was 10pm when we got or Fiske Fries; then corn dog; then elephant ears; then cotton candy. We got back home about 10:30. Fun, but I wouldn't do it again that way...



As we moved into the semester, Amber worked hard to keep up in all her classes. Having no free period was difficult and then adding a college course on top of that made it even more so. However, she was up to the task, bringing home great grades and comments with the first report card. However, I'd often arrive at home to see her studying hard at the kitchen table, laptop open with notebooks and books surrounding her.



October also brought Amber's first official college visit – to Anderson University! I was able to set up class attendance with two of Piper's professors, so the sisters went to Ecology and Organic Chemistry together. Between these lectures, Amber toured AU's new cybersecurity lab and was just fascinated. The next day, we took the campus walking tour, as AU continues to do them in person and will as long as participants wear their masks, stay distant, and respect the rules. It was a wonderful experience and I just can't believe that she's already at that age!





As we approached the end of October, Amber's competitive artistic juices were flowing as the FRHA announced there would be a "costume class" at the Affiliate Regional Championship on Halloween night. She wanted to enter, so she got an idea, fabric, lots of safety pins (we don't have a sewing machine) and a slinky and blanket for Spook to put it all on. Logan was good natured enough to help her as she cut and pinned scale after scale to Spook's costume. She was to be a dragon, led in by the "flame" (Amber in a red dress.) We took it to Stevens to see if Spook would allow it on her and she was such a good mare!

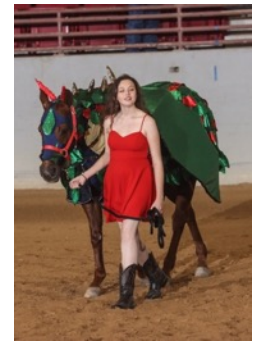


Steven suggested we needed the spikes to stand up and to add wings, which we did before the show.

Halloween weekend found us at the FRHA show with Spook – the SE ARC to qualify to go to Oklahoma City in December for the finals. Tough competition, but Amber qualified in two classes – Rookie I and Youth. She also finished Green nicely, pointing out for Green 1 for the year.



This was exciting, but we also looked to the fun part of the show. The kids trick-or-treated through the barns and looked so cute in their costumes! Then, it was the horses' turn. Amber had worked for two weeks to design a costume for Spook to enter the costume class on Halloween night. The competition for this was as fierce – maybe even more than the reining! Everyone did an amazing job, and these horses



were such great animals to put up with them all. We competed against Sven (Frozen), the Banshi of Avatar, the Wizard of Oz, Unicorns, Trump 2020, Beat COVID, Indian Pony, Pirate Pony, Cheshire Cats, and more. In the end, Amber and Spook triumphed with a win for the youth as the "Scaly Green Dragon led by the Flame in the Red Dress"! Amber and Spook brought home an outdoor movie projector and movie package with popcorn bucket, popcorn, and candy.

So much fun! She bowed out of the adult competition, which was won by "The Wizard of Oz." We've had a great year with Spook and Marbry Performance Horses! NRHA has been a wonderful experience.





Amber really completed her goals in reining for 2020 – even through the obstacles presented through COVID. She’s greatly improved as a rider in her sport, qualified for the North American Affiliate Championship in two classes (Youth and Rookie), and pointed out of Green level 1 for the year – we are so proud of her!

November usually brought Mama and I to our annual visit to the Carolina Craftsman’s Christmas Classic and the Jr. League Holiday Market; however, both shows are canceled this year with COVID concerns. Better safe than sorry. I wish there was a way to have them online, though – the artwork and unusual stores that are presented allow for some fun and unique Christmas gifts.

As we looked to the Oklahoma North American Affiliate Championship competition for Amber and Spook, we reflected on how good Spook had been for Amber. She was such a great teacher and she taught Amber so much in just a year. Amber was ready to move on to her next partner; and Spook needed to move on to another rider she could help grow from a Green to a Rookie to a Non-Pro. On Friday the 13th of November, Spook left our family to join the Willis family and partner with Bradleann. She’ll stay at Steven’s and possibly retire to the Willis’ farm to enjoy being a “mama” again in the future. We wish this team great success and much love. It’s rather odd to us, though, for the first time we were without a horse to ride of our own, as Fancy is at St. Andrew’s University and, thanks to COVID, we can’t even visit her ☹️. Amber went after school to hug Spook and speak to Steven about next steps. So, we looked forward to OKC with a new goal in mind – finding Amber’s next partner as she continues to move forward in NRHA. Many prayers went into the decision and much anticipation as we looked toward the trip.

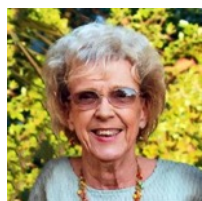


and friends – Addi Taylor, Audrey Ann Atkinson, and Lexi Hill. Logan also joined us for the show and he and John shared a room next to ours. These boys are all right – got up to leave with us at 5:15am and videoed team rides all day for us. We got

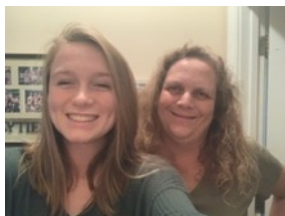
The weekend before Thanksgiving, we headed to the Olympic horse park in Conyers, GA for Amber’s next IEA show – this show Flamekissed helped King sponsor and Amber showed twice in horsemanship and reining. Piper came down with John to help warm up horses and was delighted to see other siblings / former teammates



home around 9:30pm, and Amber had gained more IEA points for the day as well as the award for the Open High Point Rider of the afternoon. As a team, high school was first in one show and second in the other; middle school was first in both shows. Fun show – fun times! Go Flamekissed!



After the show, we got the sad news that my Aunt Lois had passed away. As a child, I loved visiting her while she worked at “Ginsbergs.” Aunt Lois always had a smile on her face and a vivacious personality. The trees in her backyard were the best for climbing and she loved cats. She went to sleep one evening and awoke in Heaven with Uncle Sam. So thankful it was peaceful for her.



Then came Thanksgiving. Much smaller than usual, as every celebration this year has been.

However, we did enjoy our turkey and dressing, and all the “fixin’s.” The boys always sit at Lee’s feet as he carves the turkey (or, this year, a turkey breast with rib meat) and weren’t disappointed. Mama and Daddy joined us (Mama had just had eye surgery) but Mom decided to stay at home this year. I do hope things get back to normal next year.

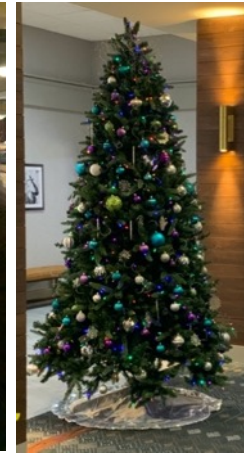


The first week of December was the North American Affiliate Championship and NRHA Futurity. We headed to OKC– not to show, but to shop for her next partner. We had a great week, even though we didn’t find that perfect match (and are still shopping). Amber got to ride so many amazing horses and speak



to some of the top professional reiners in the industry – Matt Mills, Casey Deary, and Abby Lengel. She even got to meet Ace, Abby’s beautiful buckskin. She also got to cheer on her friends Jada and Chloe, who had great runs. She was also blessed to ride 10-15 great horses and while we really liked two of them for her, they weren’t quite the right match. While in OKC, we got some Christmas shopping done and enjoyed the hospitality of the Embassy Suites with their cooked to order breakfasts each morning and Christmas decorations before weeks’ end. We also visited Cattleman’s Steakhouse a couple of times and found a new favorite – Zios Italian. Amber was able to Zoom many of her classes and we had a great time.





Mid-week, we took a trip to Stillwater, OK to view the campus of OSU. Amber absolutely loved it. She's visited seven colleges so far, and this one is by far her front runner. Not sure how we feel about her thinking of a college 1000 miles away, but they have so many options for her that we'd be so proud if she decided to go there. She wants to be a veterinarian and they have a great vet school with great majors/minors for her to choose from in Biology, Zoology, BioChemistry, Chemistry, etc. They are also the home of Ed Roberts, the inventor of the first personal computer (the Altair 8800) and have options toward her second interest – computer science. Still have four or five she wants to visit, so we'll see where that leads.

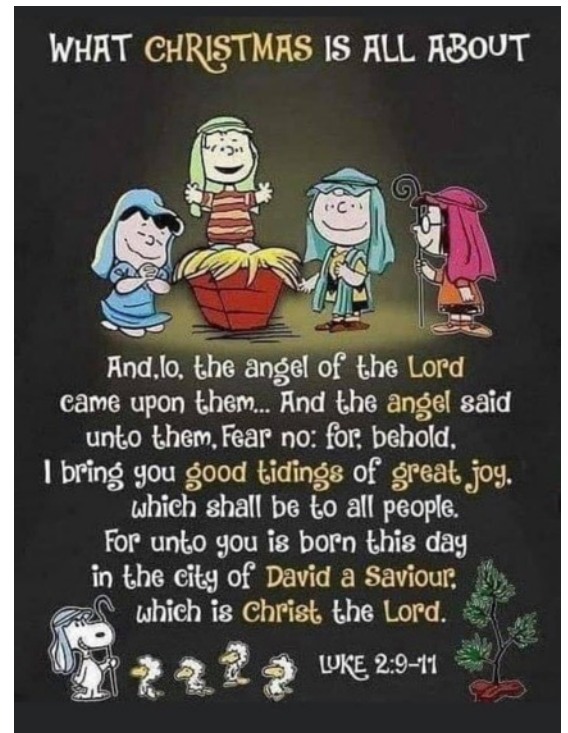




We are so thankful to the Lord above for taking care of us and guiding us on this trip. And so thankful that He brought our trainer, Steven Marbry into our lives. His experience and thoughtful advice are invaluable as we move into this very nerve-wracking journey of finding Amber's partner for the next couple of years of competition. We headed back to SC counting many blessings.

So, friends, before I close this letter, let me once again emphasize how very important it is to be ready when God calls. I believe He gives everyone a chance to repent, accept His gift of Jesus' sacrifice, and follow Him. Please, if you do not have a relationship with God, talk to someone – a pastor, a friend, me. But especially, talk to God. Ask Him to reveal Himself to you; ask Him to forgive you for your sins; ask Jesus to come into your heart and life; ask Him to save you from your sins; ask Him – and He will forgive and accept you into the Family of Christ. ***Nothing can be more important than that!***

Merry Christmas Friends! As we close 2020, may we remember that life has always had ups and downs; perhaps not so many in a single year, but always. Love your families – love your friends. Christmas is a celebration of Jesus' birth – the birth of a Savior who gave His life for you. Remember the true reason we celebrate this season. And God Bless Us All!



**Merry Christmas
to All!**

Love,



Lee, Paige, Piper, Amber



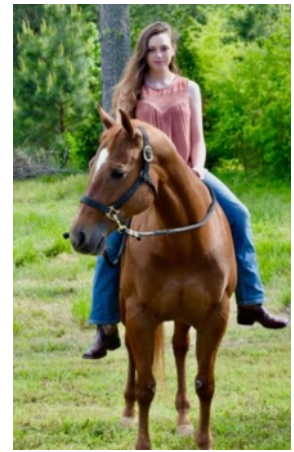
Fynn, Oreo, Snowball, Tango



Duke



Fancy



Spook