

2021 Meeker Family Christmas Newsletter 2021

Family and Friends!

Merry Christmas! Another year has come and gone and what a busy one it has been. We hope that you've had a good one - we invite you to share ours with us.



Just before sending last year's newsletter, we had one last loss of 2020: our sweet boy, Tango. We were blessed to take care of him for nearly 14 years. Our hearts are heavy, and we miss his sweet demeanor, sheltie smile, and little bumps on our leg asking if we would just pass him some table scraps, please. Tango is now with Morgan, Coosa, and our other dear pets that have gone on. I wish God would give them to us for longer - 14 years doesn't seem like enough. It seemed so strange to purchase goodies for three sets of stockings instead of four. Our heart aches.

Over Christmas holidays, Piper's boyfriend, John, came to spend a week with us. It was so nice to get to know him better. Piper enjoyed introducing John to her extended family and we enjoyed talking and growing closer. Piper also enjoyed taking him to some of her favorite Columbia places to visit. The two



planned to visit John's family in Kentucky over New Year's before the end of the break. John also helped us move Piper from her old dorm room to a

new apartment style dorm on campus over the break - her first apartment! So nice for her to have a room of her own and great roommates: Hannah, Amy, and Meredith. They even decided to go in together and get an aquarium for their place. It was nice to have the time to get to know John better and we were happy he was able to come and stay with us before heading home to Kentucky.



Last year for Christmas, we took Lee's mom and Aunt Jeanette and Aunt Rachel to Disney; this year, we took my parents, Aunt Nell, and Kim. So happy that we did that! While masks were required, it was so nice to walk through Disney Springs, shop, enjoy the decorations, and enjoy some nice meals together.



After they headed back to SC, Lee, the girls, and I stayed to enjoy a couple of days in the parks before coming home. I love the decorations at Disney, though a lot has changed over the years. This year, we were disappointed that the large gingerbread displays were missing - Disney felt they draw a crowd and so they did not do them this year. However, they did create miniatures of the carousel and house that we were able to bring home with us. Beautiful and delicious!

We enjoyed, as always, spending Christmas with family; opening packages, eating good food, and sharing stories. Christmas is such a magical time of year that we can celebrate Christ's birth together.





After Christmas, Piper returned the favor and went to Kentucky to meet John's family. She had a great time and a great New Year's Eve as they showed her around their area of the country.

Since our return from the NRHA Futurity, we continued to look for a new partner for Amber. I must have driven Steven crazy sending video after video but he was patient - guess that's part of his job! Then, he sent one to me. He said "I think this is the one." I was thinking we needed to travel to Texas to try him but Steven was thinking we should vet check and bring him home - he was that sure! Doing a bit of research, we did the vet check (which was as clean as they come) and wired the money to bring "Smiling At You" (affectionately known at "Smiley" to us) to SC. As soon as he stepped off the trailer, I knew we'd made a good decision.



There were smiles all around as we welcomed Smiley as a new member of the Meeker family. We can't thank Steven, his friend Jimbo (who tried Smiley in TX for us) and the McCutcheon family enough for this sweet beautiful boy!

He arrived 1/4/21 and is the sweetest, gentlest, most affectionate, and powerful horse we've ever met. Smiley loves playing with Amber's hair, Piper's zipper, and he loves to run. He was so friendly as he met each of us! We were so excited to watch their partnership grow.



Piper, Hannah, Amy, and Meredith headed to the pet store and purchased some fish to enjoy - they made the aquarium so cute with their decorations and named them all. The snail (Chewy) happened to be my favorite - he was a good little guy that kept the tank clean and liked to "hang out" in the taco truck! The others were named Sushi, Taco, Wasabi, Christopher Wild, Bink-Bink, and Peanut.



Sadly, January 9th, COVID claimed another member of our family. Wiley Alexander was my Daddy's cousin. He was such a wonderful, warm, happy person. He kept the Huggins' family reunion alive. His church was having a prayer vigil, during which, as family and friends were united in prayer, Wiley was welcomed into the arms of his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, never to be in pain or on a ventilator again. He is so missed.



Though we'd only had him a couple of weeks, we decided to try out the first NRHA show of the season with Smiley and see what would happen. Wow - was he fast! We learned a lot at the Heart of Dixie show and Amber and Smiley were on track for a great season.

Unfortunately, Aunt Nell went to the doctor for some tests and came home not doing well. It was determined the next day that she had suffered a stroke. She has worked very hard to overcome the results of this, getting back strength in her side and no longer jumbling her words. We so wish that had never happened to her.



2021 was a milestone year for Lee and I - we both hit the half century mark. Fifty really doesn't feel so old where I am now... Piper had come by to decorate my office and my girls treated me so nicely with beautiful and thoughtful gifts, as did Lee, adding some beautiful flowers! Lee's birthday celebration was to follow in May...

Amber began the normal high school process of standardized testing. While many colleges are currently "test optional" on their applications, Hammond warned us that they really do want to see the test scores if you have them. She took the ACT and SAT in February and received high marks on both! We are so proud of our smart, sweet girl! OSU also noticed and quickly invited Amber for a private scholar's tour. We scheduled it for June, to coincide with their equestrian camp and began to look forward to our visit (and prepare our hearts that she really loved a school half-way across the country). Their program looked really good for her and she felt so at home there when we visited last December. We also played around with a website for Amber - if you'd like to see it, check out ambercmeeker.info online.



Since Hammond's winter break coincided with over half of the week of the huge Florida Reining Classic in Jacksonville, we headed down to FL at the end of the month. When not showing, Amber virtually toured UGA and University of Florida, as they were not allowing on campus visits yet. UGA did as good a job as possible in my opinion in their virtual experience, having both admissions counselors and students online to answer questions and zoom with students as well as having a pretty thorough video tour of campus. However, it's really hard to get a feel for a campus when you're not on it. NC State, her other interest, also had not opened for tours and did not have a virtual tour option for us. It's difficult looking for colleges with COVID hanging over us. We also had one day of her break to sneak down to Disney Springs after exercising Smiley for some mother/daughter shopping and dining time.



The show was amazing! Amber had an awesome weekend. It's always nice to show in sunny Florida; we started our week in the low 50's with fog and ended with a sunburning 88 degrees on Sunday! So thankful to National Sports Broadcasting for the wonderful photos!

Amber has worked hard to get to know her new horse, Smiley. He arrived in SC in early January and at this show, she not only rode him so consistently in the Rookie, Green, and Youth runs and she hit her personal best score to date! Ended up second in Green 2 on Friday and missed weekend high point by half a point. So proud! The FRHA folks made it even more fun with great prizes, food, and people as Amber brings home a chair, lots of grooming supplies, bags, and buckets, a halter, a multitool, a lead rope, a bridle rack, and even more fun, a paycheck! So proud of her!



So proud of her!



But what makes a show great is not just about the prizes won and the accomplishments made, but the friends along the way and memories made. From meals to practice, playing around to watching and supporting, and the fun "horse drawings" on the white board - can't beat this group! Wanted to share some pics from the weekend! Love our barn family!



Piper also received some exciting news - she was accepted to an internship in St. Augustine, FL at Marineland, the oldest oceanarium in the US. While it was an unpaid internship and she would be away for 3 months of the summer, we were so very excited for her and felt blessed that we had the means to help support this opportunity. There were five interns chosen for the summer and one contacted Piper fairly quickly. She was a Christian and could tell



from Piper's social media that Piper was also - they decided to room together. I found a nice, affordable condo about 10 miles from Marineland on Anastasia Island, just south of the historic district of St. Augustine. Ansie's mom agreed it looked good, we booked it for the summer for the girls.



For what seemed like the millionth time this year, I wondered where the time had gone as Amber and I began looking for her first prom dress. Having had wonderful experience with Katz Formal for Piper, we headed there first and were not disappointed. We tried several beautiful dresses, but Amber found her perfect one - she looked like a princess! Piper was able to make the trip to Columbia to help and we brought home a beautiful blue dress. We found perfect shoes, had it altered slightly, and were so excited for the upcoming event!



Because of COVID, there was not an official art showing at Hammond this year; however, the AP Students displayed their work in the innovation center and I was able to go and view Amber's art on display. Even though I'd seen her working on it, I have to say I'm so impressed with the beauty and talent she displayed as well as her imagination. The theme was to have people think about conservation and how we are losing these precious animals. Her imagination and creative ideas were really brought to light and Mrs. Ramsby's guidance and teaching really shone through. It was beautiful work.



Unfortunately, Snowball started having issues again with bladder stones. The hopeful fix from last year was not enough to help him with the size of the new stones and we had to go through a much more extensive (and expensive) surgery with the little fellow. Thankfully, he came through with flying colors. When they went in, it was the best possible scenario and so it wasn't as hard on the little fellow as it could have been. He came home to recover and was just as mischievous as ever. Not a fun way to celebrate his 11th birthday, but he did get a birthday hamburger. He also figured out how to pop off the cone and getting it back on was a struggle with this stubborn little wiggler - he's lucky he's cute!



While horse people all know that their "official birthday" is January 1, Smiley turned five to me on March 17th. Happy birthday to this sweet boy!

Another effect of COVID was that we had been unable to visit our sweet Fancy at St. Andrews University since we left her in August. They were so kind to send us updates and photos and took really good care of her;



however, when St. Andrews opened up college tours, we took the opportunity to tour the school and see our girl. Mrs. Carla even let Amber have a lesson with the team, and we gathered a lot of good information about the school. They have a wonderful pre-vet program as well as an interesting camp in the summer especially for high school students. It was good to see Fancy and what a wonderful experience. We also got to visit with Duke and send Piper a photo of her sweet boy, who is doing so well at St. Andrews. Both horses have students there who love them and they are teaching the kids so much.



At the end of March, we returned to Jacksonville for our next FRHA show with Smiley and he didn't disappoint - it's always fun to show with friends and our barn family is the best! Two reserve champions the first day and two champions the second! Loving the 91-degree weather!





In early April, I learned of the passing of a friend. Anne Pfahler was a wonderful person I met through my love of quilling (paper filigree). She quilled a beautiful birth announcement for Piper and was so very talented. She will be missed and I will always treasure her beautiful work, smile each time I see it, and think of her.

The nice thing about selling a horse within your barn family is that you can keep up a bit. So nice to see Spook on occasion and know that she's happy in her new home with her new little girl!



Enjoyed celebrating Easter again with family. So happy to have Mama, Daddy, Mom, Aunt Nell, and Kim join us for a nice meal. So nice that Aunt Nell could join us after her stroke. Family is so important.



Lee had been able to get his vaccines started, but I was having trouble finding the Pfizer one available; it seemed to do the best for our family, so I really wanted that one. AU to the rescue - they arranged vaccines with the county for all employees and I was able to get started just after Easter. Happy to have it behind me.



As time for the prom approached, Amber was disappointed that some of her friends didn't want to go; however, Camille didn't disappoint. Logan came to pick up Amber early enough for photos and brought her a beautiful corsage that perfectly matched her dress, as did his tie and cummerbund. They made a perfect couple, and he was so sweet to her! We took several photos at the house and at Mama and Daddy's - their yard is so beautiful - before gathering at the country club in town with other Hammond students for a group photo of the juniors. Then, the kids headed to the prom and afterwards, Amber and Logan joined Camille and her escort at Camille's home to watch a movie. The boys then went home, and the girls spent the night having a great time. Oh, to be young!





And then it happened - our little girl turned 17. Through the years, Amber has grown into such a beautiful and special young lady. She takes on much responsibility - coming in from school and taking care of the dogs, getting homework done, and fixing dinner on her own on some days and on others, driving 1.5 hours to Steven's to work with Smiley, then coming home to complete her homework before bedtime. She loves learning for the sake of learning and strives to do her best in all she does, making sure she understands it along the way. Happy birthday, my sweet girl!

We enjoyed a nice Mother's Day, complete with a breakfast from Riverbanks Zoo and beautiful gifts; however, the most beautiful gifts of all are my sweet girls Piper and Amber, who made me a mother. We then got to celebrate with our mothers - Mama, Daddy, and Mom came over for a nice dinner. Kim and Aunt Nell also joined us - It was nice to have everyone together.



Piper finished her second year at AU with flying colors, Dean's List honors, and a change of major to Environmental Science, which more closely matches her love of conservation. Lee and I went up to help her get her things and brought them home while she attended a summit at her church, as she was to become a church leader when she returns in the fall. Piper came home for about 5 days before moving to St. Augustine to her first condo. Such a whirl-wind!

Mid-week on 5/12, Piper, her Nana, and I loaded up her car and mine and we drove down I-95 to St. Augustine. The condo was so cute! A kitchenette, two bedrooms, two bathrooms, laundry room, living area, and balcony from which you could see the ocean - what more could anyone want? The condo was gated and included two pools, private beach access, and several spots to sit, walk, or play games. We got Piper settled, did a first grocery run to set up the kitchen with essentials, and had to drive back before meeting



Ansie, who came the next day. Amber was keeping me very busy - so I had to get her to a horse show in TN that Friday. What made things even more exciting was that this was during the gas shortage - at least that's what the media would scare many into believing - so many were running to the gas pumps draining every gallon. However, having to drive one child to FL, get back to SC, and then take the other to TN, I was concerned. Much prayer went up and God provided - all the truck stops had plenty of gas and we made it to all locations - the most trouble we had was getting gas locally, as panicked folks grabbed every gallon they could, just like those who took everything they could off the grocery store shelves. I wish people would take what they need instead of greedily taking it all. We kept in touch with Ansie and her mom Emilie and gave them exit numbers where we found gas - they also made it down to FL safely and got moved in.



Meanwhile, Amber was keeping very busy. In the previous two weeks, she had completed her college computer science course online, her AP Art exam, her AP Language exam, and her AP Biology exam. How did she celebrate? By heading to TNRHA's Spinning in the Rein Derby! Had a good weekend - came away with points in youth, money in green and limited non-pro (her first time running in a non-pro class!) and ran in her first derby coming away with a top 10 and great showmanship experience! She also qualified for the Rookie and Non-Pro Run for the Million. So proud of Amber and Smiley and the team they are becoming! Smiley was with her every step of the way! Steven has really brought Amber so far in her riding. She was so very excited and we began to plan out going to Las Vegas to compete in The Run for a Million. This show has become rather famous, where many of the big-name reiners go to attempt to win a million dollar purse, not to mention all the bragging rights! Amber competing with the best this country has to offer - what an honor and privilege. Have to say, after driving all over the southeast during a gas shortage, I was exhausted but so very proud.



THE RUN FOR A MILLION

2021 TENNESSEE REINING HORSE ASSOC. | MURFREESBORO, TN

ROOKIE QUALIFIED RIDERS

- SHELLEY PUTVINSKI
- AMBER MEEKER
- USA LEE
- CHLOE SCOTT
- KRISTA BICKETT
- LISA M MOUNTAIN
- HILARY HESTER
- TRACY FLORY HUNTER

NON PRO QUALIFIED RIDERS

- JENNY LYNN HOPPER
- KENNEDY STEPHENS
- STACY YARBROUGH
- AMBER MEEKER



May also brought two birthdays - Duke and Fancy. While we no longer own Duke (we donated him to St. Andrew's University's Equestrian Program), he will always hold a special place in our hearts. We still get updates and even get to visit occasionally. He's a hit with their program and doing so well for them in reining, horsemanship, and ranch! Fancy, too is at St. Andrew's on a lease and loves her home there - lots of green pastures and she's great with the riders as well. So thankful that our big babies are in such a good place.



Finally, UGA opened up for actual tours on campus - so we headed down to Athens for a look around. Amber really liked the campus, but Oklahoma remained her first choice. It was a fun tour and we enjoyed learning more about the school.



The normal junior year trip was canceled for Hammond - to Costa Rica - due to COVID restrictions; so after the prom, the students completed their exams and any AP's they had to take and then they were out for the summer - and just like that I had a high school senior!

How did we celebrate? With another horse show, of course. The Florida Reining Horse's Memorial Day show was also a lot of fun. Amber rode again as a Non-Pro and this time, she won the class! She brought home her biggest paycheck to



date and had a blast. Lee met up with John and the two of them came down on Saturday; Jacksonville is only about an hour from St. Augustine, and Piper came up to join us.



After the show, we all headed to St. Augustine for a few days around Memorial Day and Lee celebrated his 50th birthday at both the show and with Piper. He also got to visit a little with Aunt Jeanette and Aunt Rachel. Aunt Jeanette had had some trouble after eye surgery and he wanted to be sure she was okay. So nice to spend his birthday with family! We had a great time in St. Augustine, met Ansie, and explored the historic district a little. Then, we all headed back to SC from which John went to Kentucky (his home) until the start of his mission trip to MI. Such a busy summer! While in St. Augustine, Piper took John and Amber to Marineland and we got to enjoy some nice meals together.



We didn't have much time to breathe; once we returned from the Memorial Day show, we packed up and headed to Oklahoma State's Equestrian Camp. This weeklong camp gave the participants a real view into what it's like to be a collegiate equestrian. From workouts to practices, to meals, movies, and fun, it was such a great experience for Amber. She made so many friends. She also seemed to realize that, while it would be so much fun and so exciting, it would also take up a lot of time. With her dream to become a veterinarian, she decided that, for her purposes, she wants to enjoy her sport in her spare time instead of being a part of a team so that she can concentrate on her academics. She's decided to ride as much as she can until she goes to college and then... we'll see.



While Amber was at the camp, Lee and I explored the area, learning more about Stillwater and spending one day traveling to OKC (had to get Cattleman's!). We found a great wildlife park where we got to hold a baby red kangaroo - so sweet and so much fun! After we told Amber, she insisted that she get to go back after the college tour and meet the baby, which we did.



The Friday after the camp, OSU had arranged quite a red carpet tour for Amber. Back in February, we'd been invited to arrange a private tour, so we did. We were taken by golf cart to meet the Dean of the Honors college, one of the CAS professors, one of the members of the international travel staff, and the scholarship folks. When we began, we also talked to them about Amber's dream of being a vet, and the vet school had just (the week before) opened for tours again. So they quickly added that to our day's agenda and we enjoyed learning about the vet school as well. We were treated to a nice lunch and had a great time before heading back to SC. Amber really loved OSU!



Though a busy summer schedule didn't permit her to work past June, Amber was grateful for the opportunity to work at New Beginnings with her mentor, Debra Wright. She loves Mrs. Debra and learned so much in her time there.



For the first time in 20 years, Piper couldn't be home for Father's day; however, she was with us in spirit and via Facetime so that she could enjoy some time with her Daddy. We had a nice meal and enjoyed being with family.

Can't believe this boy is seven years old! He acts just like a puppy. The only thing that seems to show his age is that Fynn can outrun him in the yard. He's also become a bit frightened of thunderstorms and just shakes. Our sweet Oreo really enjoyed his birthday hamburger.



So happy that Carrie and Kate, our dear friends, could steal some time away from Texas and come for a visit. Amber introduced Kate to Smiley and we got to catch up on all the latest news. Good friends are always there, even if they don't live nearby any longer. Wish we lived closer to one another, though.

Meanwhile, Piper's roommate Ansie had discovered surfing and loved it. She convinced Piper to give it a try and I think she's hooked. Such a fun activity! The girls would rent boards (and sometimes take a lesson) and hit the waves on their shared day off. They worked 40 hours/week and each had two days off each week. Piper's were Sunday/Monday and Ansie's were Monday/Tuesday so Monday's were their day to do roommate adventures.



Piper was working hard on her internship. There were three levels that the interns try to attain; during level 1, they are learning all the necessary cleaning procedures, helping the trainers, attending lectures, and taking quizzes and tests. Piper was the first to pass the level 1 test and move to level 2, which had more dolphin time. She was really excited about this.



They gave her a special treat - she got to go into the water with two of the dolphins and take a superman pose; then, the two dolphins pushed her through the water by putting their noses on her feet! So exciting! She loved it.



Ansie was quick to follow Piper and second to pass level 1 and she also participated in the superman swim. As another reward, they got to pick a favorite dolphin to make them a painting! Piper chose Boomer and Ansie chose Surge. They are SO CUTE! The dolphins made the paintings while the girls held the canvas. Such a treasured keepsake to remember their time at Marineland!



Missing our sweet Piper, we arranged to reserve a place in the same condo complex that Piper was staying in. We headed to St. Augustine the first half of the week of the Fourth of July. We had such fun! We went to Disney Springs (a 1.5 hour drive from there) on the Fourth to enjoy some shopping and delicious meals. Then we were joined by my parents, Aunt Nell and Kim for a day or two. Piper's days off were Sunday and Monday, so she had to work part of the time we were there. It was so nice to see Piper and her roommate, Ansie. What fun! The hardest part was leaving.



With Amber's ambition to become a veterinarian, we were blessed to have the opportunity for her to attend the St. Andrews University Veterinary Camp for a week. She learned so much! She took blood, dissected a sheep's eye and heart, gave medication, practiced stitches, reviewed x-rays - all under the guidance of a veterinarian that is also a professor on their campus. She left with a certificate and verification of 40 clinical hours. What a wonderful experience.





Amber C. Meeker

has earned the

AP[®] Scholar Award

which recognizes exemplary college-level achievement, for scoring 3 or higher on three or more AP Exams.

David Coleman
David Coleman, CEO College Board

Andrew Park
Andrew Park, Senior Vice President AP and Honors

JULY 16, 2021

AP CollegeBoard

When Amber's results from her AP exams rolled in, we were excited that she received college credit for every course - Biology, English, and Art. She works so hard and it's really paying off for her. So proud of our baby girl! She also received an AP award for having so many scores at this level. I just adore the artwork she produced! Her theme was conservation and her art depicted how animals are disappearing around us - fading away like a butterfly or bat, melting like a polar bear, trapped like the whales, hunted for bones, like



a tiger, deforestation removing hidden homes, an hour glass running out of time, or burning up like a salamander. Her ideas captivated! Here are a few of her creations that we wanted to share.

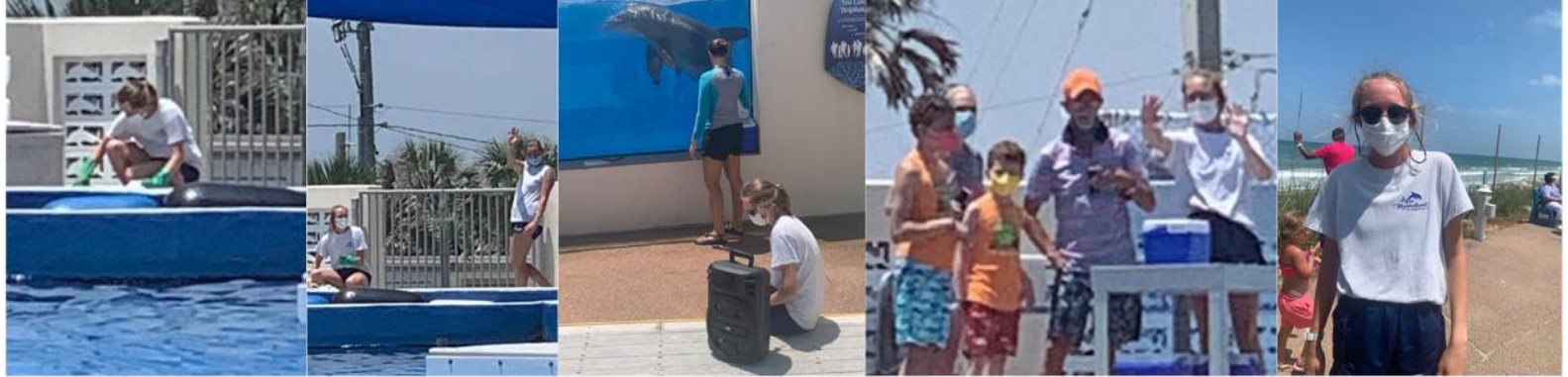


Piper's friends from AU were able to come down to FL and visit for a few days and really enjoyed getting to see Marineland. Piper and Ansie took them for a surfing lesson - Ansie really loved to surf and Piper got the bug too. It's not easy, but so much fun she tells me. Between the two roommates, Piper and Ansie had family and friends visit throughout the summer, which was so nice.



We only had a day to spend at the beach, but we headed to Garden City to see everyone. We enjoyed the breezes on the beach that day and had a nice meal with everyone before heading back home. It was nice to enjoy the beach, even for just a day.





Amber and Lee were both very busy toward the end of July, so I decided to make a fast trip to see Piper in St. Augustine one last time. I really wanted to see her in action. I went to Marineland and watched her help with one of the afternoon shows as well as work with cleanup and normal duties around the dolphins. I also finally got to see the beach near her condo up close and personal - every other visit I'd seen it from her balcony but had not had time



to go and walk it. It was beautiful! It was just for a day and a half, but it was nice to see her. She was to head home in a couple of weeks, but for the first time, we would not be able to help her move in to her dorm at AU. It was hard to leave her.

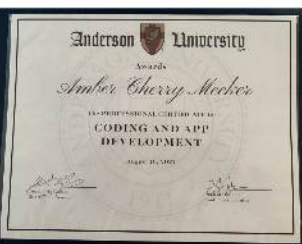


Amber got to enjoy a ZooTeen trip again this year. So glad they got to enjoy trips this summer, though instead of the normal entire group overnight, this year there were three smaller groups that took day trips. Amber had a great time at the NC Zoo with her fellow ZooTeen's.

Unfortunately, after just under a year of dating, Amber and Logan decided that they needed to part ways. He was a really good first boyfriend.



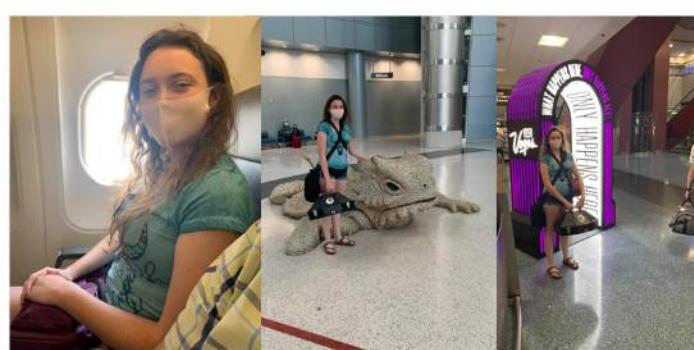
Amber seems to have a passion and feels so at home at OSU, so she applied quickly to the school. They seem to want her just as badly! Three days later, she received her acceptance via email and then a few days after that, by postal mail. She was SO excited! Can't believe our baby is almost heading to college! The emailed version contained virtual confetti; the postal version included a card that opened up to the OSU fight song. So fun!



As if her summer wasn't busy enough, Amber also wanted to take a fourth coding class at Anderson and complete the certificate program. She also wanted to learn an additional coding language and the University of Michigan had a class for high school students in Python. So, this summer she added web development (HTML, CSS, PHP, and JavaScript) and Python to her knowledge tool box.



The weekend of August 14th was filled with activity. Lee, Amber, and I were leaving for Las Vegas for The Run for a Million; Piper was completing her internship and about to start her third year of college; and Mama and Daddy were having their 52nd wedding anniversary. (We celebrated before leaving.) Such a busy time. On Saturday, Amber took her first plane ride across the country and really enjoyed watching us take off and land.



Meanwhile, Piper had her last day at Marineland. She had a very successful summer and made good friends and references should she ever want to train dolphins (she's now fully qualified for the job). However, Piper had decided that, while exciting and fun, working with dolphins is not the main focus of her life. She came back to AU after packing up her condo that Sunday for classes to begin on Monday. It was the first time Lee and I couldn't help her move in, but John met her at AU and helped her, as did her roommates. She



came away from the internship with much knowledge and many new friends. She also excelled in her end of internship reviews. So proud of her accomplishments.



As Piper began her third year at AU, Amber, Lee, and I took Amber's first plane trip across the country to Las Vegas. We stayed at the South Point Casino, which was appropriately "Equestrian" themed, and the view from our room was beautiful. Everything we needed was inside the casino, including the arena! There were also 12 restaurants, a movie theater, bowling alley, arcade, and a nice shop, as well as (of course) Tractor Supply! Never thought I'd see a building that made the Grand Floridian look small, but I could have fit it in here multiple times. Vegas is a crazy place! Smiley was to meet us there, traveling with a friend of Steven's who was competing as well - but for \$1 million! Brian Bell couldn't have been nicer, as was his wife (Naïke), son, and helpers. We tried to make ourselves useful and arrived to help unload. It was so exciting!



The next couple of days, as Amber was working with Smiley, she was riding side-by-side with some of reining's top professional riders - Brian Bell (who was also coaching her), Tom and Cade McCutcheon, Craig Schmersal, Matt Mills - it was so exciting! Taylor Sheridan (producer of Yellowstone and The Last Cowboy) was running fast



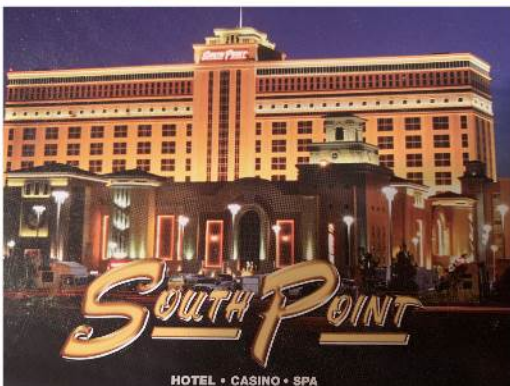
circles as she was working on slower ones. She was riding and competing with the best this country has to offer - so proud of her! She rode in both the Rookie and Non-Pro classes and looked amazing. We also met up with a friend from OSU Equestrian camp and had a nice dinner with she and her family. Horse people are good people!



Saturday, we took our place in line to get autographs from the fifteen riders that would be competing that evening. Casey Deary was so hilarious! And every one of the professional riders, that day and every other, were great with the non-pros, rookies, and youth. So encouraging for them. Amber asked them to sign the bag she received in the draw - the one that said "Qualified Rider" - such a unique keepsake with all 15 signatures on there. :)



Saturday evening, we joined the audience to watch the big event. First, the freestyle reining took place and the costumes, music, and patterns just took your breath away - the talent of these riders! Then, the Run for a Million started. We watched as rider after rider competed - it could have been won by any of them! Just like any good sporting event, it came down to the end with a runoff between the top two riders who were tied for first place. An experience we will never forget!



I have to say, I've never really had a desire to visit Las Vegas, but while we were there, we wanted to see the strip. The hotels there are insane - I never thought I'd see anything that made the Grand Floridian look small, but our own hotel/casino had three arena's and all the stalls inside (air conditioned). We took the bus to the start of the strip and got off to walk. We walked about 2.5 miles, going in and out of different casinos. Each one had different themes - Egypt, Paris, Flamingos, Dolphins, Aquariums, Caesar's Palace even had a mall inside it. Such a beautiful place - but with the "other activities" that go on, it's not my vacation



choice. We ended our visit around 4pm after watching the fountains at the Bellagio twice - breathtaking. Such an adventure.



Sadly, while at The Run for a Million, we learned of the passing of one of our favorite comedienne's - Jeanne Robertson. Lee and I were blessed to meet her and her husband ("Left Brain") at one of her rocking-chair shows. They were so nice and down to earth. She was one of those special people that found laughter everywhere she went, and then shared it with her audience. Her husband had passed not long before and, after a brief illness, she went to Heaven to join him. Her humor and stories always brightened my day and I will certainly miss hearing each new one.

When we returned from Las Vegas, Amber left bright and early Monday morning for her very last first day of school. We have a **SENIOR!!!** Our sweet high school senior has once again set an ambitious study schedule for herself, including AP Calculus, AP Physics, AP Chemistry and AP Government as she writes her college essays and applies for scholarships. I look back and still recall that sweet little ladybug that walked into Mrs. Barrett's classroom, turned around with her palm up and said "Bye, Mama!" She has loved Hammond from the moment she walked on the campus. She actually had two "first day" pictures - she was competing in Las Vegas during her real "first day" and the actual first day on campus. It's the only first day in 14 years we've missed and it was **NOT** an easy decision. Her friend Alysa met us near the Chapel - both of them were ladybugs 14 years ago and both are still best of friends. This will be an exciting year.

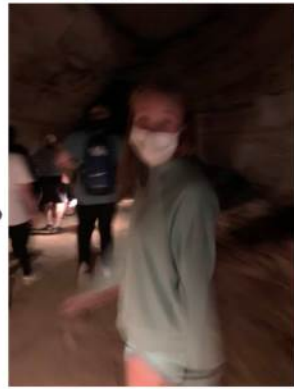


This cute little rascal can't possibly be three years old already!?! Fynn is still so much a puppy I can't believe he's now three. But, we got him Piper's senior year of high school, so that must be true. Our new pet sitters had gotten some amazing photos during our summer/fall trips, and really captured his little personality. The weekend after his birthday, Piper came home for the first time since May and we had a nice meal and celebrated his birthday with - not a birthday hamburger but a birthday tenderloin. All the dogs were happy about that.





For their second dating anniversary together, Piper decided to surprise John with a trip to Mammoth Cave. It's not far from his parent's home in Kentucky, so she and John's mom worked together. They stayed for a weekend of fun, going fruit picking and splunking. These two really care for one another. We feel so blessed that Piper found a Godly young man.



We looked forward to Amber's school senior photos - she took the normal senior drape and two more casual ones.



Piper rejoined her friends at her job at the campus post office; she also got to come home for a visit in September for the first time since May. The dogs were ecstatic to see her! We enjoyed sharing a nice meal and viewing all her summer photos. It was nice to get to unwind and have some time with her.



I also love this photo of Amber. Had to include it in the annual letter. :)



We had a scare the next week - after grilling and eating a nice meal, Oreo grabbed a corn cob. While we tried to get it away from him, he broke it into pieces and managed to swallow about a third of it. Dog's stomachs can't break this down and this could have taken him from us. We rushed him to the emergency vet who was able to get him to throw up two large pieces; however, an x-ray showed that a large piece was still in his belly. The next day, they did an endoscopy procedure and were thankfully able to grab it and confirm that no other pieces were in his stomach or gut. He came home a little groggy and confused but was back to his cheerful self the next day. Scared us so much. Very thankful to God for protecting him and providing a knowledgeable vet nearby to help our sweet boy. He's such a big part of our family.



We got to enjoy a wonderful visit from one of my dearest friends - Jennifer came to visit, catch up, and have dinner with us. We really enjoyed our talk - and she's still trying to get her taste back from her bout with COVID. It was so nice to have some time together. Lee's mom had also gotten to come for a visit, as we were planning to see Piper the next day, so we were doubly blessed that weekend. Amber really enjoyed getting some sewing lessons and ended up with a small pillow for her efforts - thanks, Grandma!



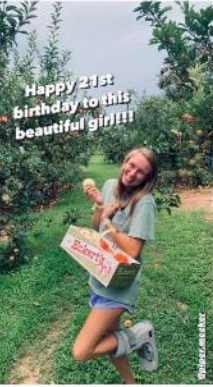
As she was born at the turn of the century, our sweet eldest daughter turned 21 this year. In what seems like the blink of an eye, she went from a sweet baby to a precocious toddler. From that toddler to an adventuresome preschooler to a talkative but shy elementary schooler, dancing and practicing gymnastics, starting karate and horseback riding. As she advanced into middle school she became more focused on the latter, giving up the dance for the riding and excelling in her sport, attending IEA Nationals three times, placing third one year and becoming the reserve champion of her class for the nation another. Then, heading into high school she learned many lessons - advancing and excelling in school and learning that some relationships are forever and others are best if they ended. The excitement of the college search seems like just yesterday as well



as her first plane trip and her first trip out of the country for a mission trip to the DR. Starting Anderson University was a dream for her and she loves her chosen school. Then, her freshman year was interrupted by COVID, as was our family dynamic as we lost people we loved to this virus. She's fallen in love. She spent a summer away for an internship while achieving the Dean's List as she goes. She's a dolphin trainer. Always a hard worker, as of next spring, she will have completed all the degree requirements for graduation in May 2022, but at my request (to not graduate the same month as her sister) will complete an additional minor program and graduate next December. After she graduates, she plans to serve the Lord through a church program called "Generation-Link" which works to plant churches across the country and perhaps pursue a seminary



degree. I blinked - and she grew into a beautiful, hard-working, dedicated follower of Christ who loves the Lord and loves her family. I can't wait to see what plans He has for her. It was a joy to celebrate at her chosen location with her grandparents, sister, and John. I get so emotional - she will soon spread her wings and fly.



Meanwhile, John and her friends hadn't let her down, taking her to breakfast, lunch, shopping, and just general "Insta" posts. Piper certainly got to celebrate turning 21 in style. My little girl has grown into a beautiful young woman. Lee and I are really proud of her.



This year, Lee and I celebrated twenty-four years together. The last couple of years have certainly had their challenges, but we are so blessed to have each other. We didn't really do anything special except stay at home and enjoy a nice meal, which certainly seems special!

October started out with a trip to Snellville, GA and a lesson with Amber's new IEA coach, Jenny King.

We had a great lesson and then explored the little town which was apparently the location of a television series Amber enjoys - Vampire Diaries and Legacy. We enjoyed a sandwich at "The Sandwich Factory" and then a yummy homemade ice cream at "The Creamery" - they had such unique flavors.



Meanwhile, Piper has been having so much fun in college - she works at the Post Office, and outside of work and study, she goes to Crosspoint Church, leading a small group and being a part of two others herself, and going on several outings with friends - shopping, concerts (and catching the drumstick!), hiking, and Clemson football. She even snuck away once to ride Smiley. Really doesn't seem like her third year!





While Amber seems to have her heart set on Oklahoma State University, she has also applied to some east coast schools - one of them is St. Andrew's University (where Duke and Fancy reside) and in October there was a day specifically set aside for equestrian scholars. We left early one Saturday and we had a wonderful day; Amber rode for Coach Carla Wennburg and toured the facility and the school. We were told about various forms of financial aid and she was excited to also get to see and talk with Dr. K, the veterinarian from the week long camp this summer, who is also a professor and vet in residence at SAU. Amber also applied to Anderson University.



When she got home, she, Marci, Alysa, and Camille went to a friend's party - all dressed up as a favorite character or just dressed up for fun. Amber loved the purple wig idea!

The next week, she received an exciting black and gold envelope from AU accepting her and inviting her to apply for some high-level scholarships; the same day, she received a call from the VP of SAU excited to tell her that her acceptance letter was in the mail. The next day, OSU sent her a free T-shirt and asked for a deposit...She has some hard choices ahead of her!



What does one do with tough choices? Go ride their horse and let him love on them! Smiley is such a sweet boy! Meanwhile, Anderson had homecoming in person this year, along with parent's weekend. Lee had to help Amber, so Piper and I had a mother/daughter day filled with a yummy brunch and a great time together on a beautiful fall day.



The end of October brought us to the Southeast Affiliate Regional Championship in Jacksonville, FL. Amber and Smiley headed south with Steven and the barn team and we had a great time. She qualified for the North American Affiliate Championship in six classes and we began planning for a trip to Oklahoma over Thanksgiving. Smiley has made Amber a wonderful partner and we love him so very much! Also love the action shots from NSB at the show!

There was also photographer Anna Ingram of Avid Photography who came and took some amazing photos of this pair and other barn friends. Amber had never ridden him bareback, so hopping on in a jumper (vs. jeans) and no saddle was a bit different, but Smiley was such a great boy on that chilly Fall morning before the competition.





Been missing my girl and the first weekend of November, Piper came home for a visit and some Christmas shopping. We had a great time together. Snowball, Oreo, and Fynn were especially happy to see her!



Mama and I were so happy to once again get to visit our annual (except for last year) shopping trip to the fairgrounds for the Carolina Craftsman's Christmas Classic. As usual, the craftsmanship was superb and the homemade goodies delicious. I love stocking up on some of my favorites for Thanksgiving and Christmas. Always a fun day spent together!



The next day, Lee, Amber, and I traveled to Conyers, GA for her first IEA show of the season. Earlier this year, we made the decision to join King Show Horses Equestrian Team, who's schedule fit our family really well. Hard to believe this will be Amber's (and I suppose our) last year in IEA - we've had a decade of IEA horse shows! This is Amber's 7th and final season (having started in 6th grade) and she's participated in every class except ranch (which is new this year). We had a great time posing for photos with the team, helping with barn work, and getting the horses settled at the Georgia International Horse Park. Sunday was a fun and challenging day, which began at 6am and ended about 7:30pm after two shows and close to 200 rides - the western side of IEA in region 4 is HUGE! Nine teams competed in 6 middle school classes (some being split due to size and safety precautions) and 8 high school classes (some split as well). Amber competes in Varsity Open (horsemanship and reining), all the competitors were great - I don't know how the judge can choose between them! But each of the two judges did choose and Amber left with points toward her individual goals and KSET high school left with two first place wins and a 2nd and 3rd for middle school. Fun day!



Lovin' the "bareback bottoms"!



While Amber was competing in GA, Piper was planning a surprise. Together with Jordan, Chris' girlfriend, these two planned to surprise John and his twin brother with a party at their parent's home in Kentucky with all their friends. They worked things out with John's mom and Piper got John to travel to KN for his birthday, telling him he was Chris' surprise (who is completing an internship near his family home). Little did they know that their friends were arriving the next day. They had a great time and John and Chris were SO surprised! Something they can certainly remember.



As the semester neared its end, final projects for internships were due; one of Piper's friends had been working to create a fashion show for the shops on Anderson's main street for a marketing internship and Piper was asked to be one of the models. My shy, beautiful girl was very tempted because there are wedding shops on main, so she agreed. She modeled three outfits and three wedding gowns. I got to go watch - not sure this mama's heart was ready to see her in a white gown! It was great to see her and meet more of her friends who attended as well.



Sometime in September, Amber started dating fellow ZooTeen, Nate. She and Nate have known each other for three years through Riverbanks and he is a fellow General - he attends my alma mater, Thomas Sumter. He was in a play just before Thanksgiving and Amber and her friends Alysa and Marci decided to attend. They had a great time.

With Amber qualifying for the NAAC, we would be heading to Oklahoma during Thanksgiving break, so we decided to have our traditional meal a bit early - on Saturday. This allowed Aunt Nell and Kim to join us, as well as John and Nate, but Lee's mom was unable to attend, so Piper planned her own Thanksgiving on the day for her grandparents also. It was so nice to have everyone together and we had a wonderful day with a delicious meal.



The next day, Hammond's National Honor Society did some campus cleanup and beautification at the Unumb Center for Neurodevelopment. Many hands made light work as they cleaned and gardened. So good to help people.

After Amber left the Unumb Center, she met Lee, Piper, John, and me at Stevens for a family photo shoot. I love how they turned out! The dogs and Smiley mainly cooperated and many thanks to Sabrina for coming to click the button for us! John also took some great shots of the girls, Lee and I. Then I got to take some with John and Piper and the girls together. It was fun.



Then, believe it or not, came the craziest two weeks of the year. I'm not really sure where the story of the happenings of the two weeks after Thanksgiving actually begins - when Amber was four in her first year at Hammond, When the girls were 8 and 5 and we started going to Disney at Christmas, when Lee and I moved into our home in 2011 and started hosting Thanksgiving for our parents, last year when we went to OKC and happened to tour OSU... well, all these events came together this year in a crazy busy two week time period that left us wondering how we did everything (and if we should have). Let me explain.

Thirteen years ago, while visiting Disney, Lee and I saw one of the most beautiful light displays I've ever seen - the Osbourne Family Spectacle of Lights. Something about that just spoke to me - it made me feel so much closer to my grandparents than I'd felt since we lost them. Every Christmas, we'd go to visit them and one of my grandmothers favorite things was to go look at Christmas lights. We'd get in the car and drive around Sumter, SC and she would delight in how people had decorated - the beauty at Swan Lake, the time it took for someone to turn their house into a light display resembling a gingerbread cottage, how everyone in a particular neighborhood had the same size tree in their front yard and all had agreed to decorate it at Christmas, making a beautiful and cohesive display (except for that "one" guy...). As we walked through Hollywood Studios, it brought me so many memories and a wistful desire that she could see it. When Disney decided to stop the display to put in a land dedicated to Star Wars, I actually sobbed. I've looked for a similar display ever since and discovered that there was one in Branson, MO in a theme park called "Silver Dollar City." Knowing we were going to Oklahoma near Christmas, I mapped the route and it didn't seem to take us too far out of the way, so I purchased tickets to the park and started planning that we'd stop there on our way to OKC.

However, Amber qualified for a class at the North American Affiliate Championship that ran on Black Friday - the day before our tickets. Thinking that Branson was much closer to OKC than it was, we decided to drive to Oklahoma, she would ride, and then we'd go to Silver Dollar City for the day and return. Even though it took us five hours to get there, I have to say that the beauty of this place was worth the trip. Silver Dollar City was filled with the true meaning of Christmas - the story of Jesus' birth was front and center. There was a fun parade with Roudolf and Frosty; exhilarating roller coasters, fun shows, delicious food - and at dusk, the lights that I'd looked forward to came on. I can't tell you how beautiful they were! While similar to the Disney display, they were not the same; however, my grandmother would have loved it. Three light tunnels, giant trees of light with lighted presents beneath them, angels and a globe, Merry Christmas stretched across the street, Santa and his sleigh, bells, and dancing lights to music. Sipping a "loaded" hot chocolate (rich chocolate with a topping of a large number of marshmallows covered in whipped cream and tiny chocolate chips with a candy cane to dip) and enjoying the lights, we spent a fun afternoon / evening during the NRHA Futurity there. It's a bit far to visit every year, but it's nice to know it's there.



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But you did read that correctly - Amber rode in OKC on Black Friday. That prevented us from hosting Thanksgiving on the day and Mom was unable to come the previous Saturday. So back in SC, Piper hosted Thanksgiving Day at our house for her grandparents. She did a wonderful job, serving Turkey, Mac-N-Cheese, Mashed Potatoes, Broccoli, Pie, and other fun goodies. She also got to spend some time with all her grandparents and catch up before her AU online exams began the next week. Have to say the dogs were REALLY EXCITED to get TWO Thanksgiving dinners!

While Piper prepared Thanksgiving, Lee, Amber, and I hit the road. We arrived in OKC on Thanksgiving day just in time to watch our trainer, Steven Marbry, ride his talented mare in the first go at the Futurity. He did great and made the semifinals and later the finals! Go Steven and Moonstone! Amber rode Smiley on Friday against pretty tough competition and she was draw 1 - the worst draw! but it is what it is. The day after she rode, we headed to Branson and enjoyed our day, then returned to OKC to ride on Monday and again on Thursday and Saturday. The classes were huge - up to 244 riders - and I was so proud of the way Amber and Smiley held up under the pressure. The scores were a little lower than we hoped, but what a wonderful opportunity. However,



riding on Thursday and Saturday brought up another problem - and as a professional problem solver, I did a crazy thing. That brought another crazy adventure...



Fourteen years is a long time to spend at a single school; but Hammond is a special place. They try to keep all age levels in touch with one another and one way they complete the circle is a very special ceremony that take place twice in a student's time there (if they are lucky) - as a K-4 student, they are paired with a senior to make a Christmas ornament and place it together on a Christmas tree. Of course, this year, the ceremony was the Friday we were to be in OKC. We couldn't miss it but it was also the only time Amber could compete at certain levels (she is now out of "Rookie 1" in NRHA after all she accomplished this year) so we booked a flight. We flew out after she rode on Thursday and landed back in Columbia that evening; Piper picked us up and we went to Hammond the next morning. Amber had met Wills (her K-4 partner) before we left for OKC and she and Michael escorted Wills to the Hammond tree to decorate it. It was such a sweet time! So many memories. So may emotions - closing the circle of Hammond education. After taking some memorable photos, we headed back to the airport with Piper in tow to get back to Oklahoma, this time a family of four again. It was so nice to have us all together again.



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That walk down memory lane was so special. Mrs. Barrett is the only K4 teacher still at Hammond from Amber's K4 year. She got her "Ladybugs" together for a photo (missing two seniors). I couldn't help but look up the K4 pics from the Gingerbread program that same day (the next steps for the K4's after the tree ceremony) and hold back a tear or two. It was so funny - the boys and girls had separate photos in K4 - they don't have that "issue" as seniors! Amber and Alysa have been friends for such a long time. So special!



Of course, to do all of this, Amber had to miss a week of school - so once again, we missed the finals at the Futurity to be able to get back to school on Monday. However, we took a brief stop on our way out of Oklahoma to take Piper through Stillwater so Amber could show her the campus of OSU. Piper enjoyed seeing the school and the Christmas decorations were so pretty there - and all orange. :) We headed home after that, exhausted, but having had a really fun time.



We drove as far as Little Rock, AR and spent the night. The next morning, we took a few minutes to see our favorite rest stop, "The Old Mill," before driving the remaining ten hours back to SC. We've never visited in winter, nor so early in the morning, but the mill, ducks, and beauty were picturesque. We enjoyed our trip so much. However, it was a lot. Not a trip we would repeat - just too much during too short of a time. A once-in-a-lifetime adventure. Oh, the emotions of your

youngest child's Senior Year! So much to do, so little time.





The night after we arrived home, Avid Photography sent me the remaining photos from Amber and Smiley's photo shoot in Florida. I just love them!

As we bring this letter to it's end, I urge you to remember the reason for the season. Without Christ's birth and sacrifice, we would all be lost. Praise God for His abounding love!

"And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the Glory of the Lord shown round about them, and they were sore afraid. And the angel said 'Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of Great Joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.'" -- Luke 2: 9-11.



*We wish you all a very Merry Christmas
and a Happy New Year!*

*Love,
Lee, Paige, Piper, Amber,
Snowball, Oreo, Fynn,*

Smiley, and Fancy

