

# 2022 Meecker Family Christmas Newsletter 2022

Dear family and friends,

This has certainly been a year of change; and change is not my strong suit. This year, we've had two homes, two graduations, two children leaving the nest in two different ways, all sprinkled with lots of adventures along the way. We look forward to sharing our year with you here.



Our last newsletter left off at the beginning of December, with some precious Hammond traditions. Over Christmas break, we got to enjoy a visit from John to our home; Piper, John, Amber, and Nate headed to Riverbanks Zoo for some fun together.

John then got to enjoy his graduation from Clemson; he graduated with a degree in Sports Communication and a minor in business. John decided to pursue a program called "Generation LINK" after graduation; through this program, he will serve a church while attending online seminary courses through Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Through the program this year, John served at Crosspoint in Clemson, SC where he led several discipleship groups, local college students, and a summer mission trip to Michigan.



Our barn family also got together for a nice dinner, where we laughed and enjoyed each other's company. Many thanks to Ellington for being such a gracious hostess and for the delicious steaks! The decorations were beautiful and a great time was had by all!



It's hard for me to imagine (I've been so spoiled) a Christmas without seeing the beauty of Disney's holiday decorations; however, the girls, after doing so much, were not eager to travel again. I couldn't believe they didn't want to go! So, Lee and I headed down - the first trip that was just the two of us in quite a while. I suppose we'll have to get used to it. We didn't go into the parks; just enjoyed some nice meals, the beautiful décor, and some time together. After picking up some last-minute Christmas gifts, we headed home. This year, we had wanted to try to get there as it was Disney's 50th anniversary of opening Walt Disney World. Disney opened the facility the same year Lee and I were born - so we all turned 50 this year. We purchased a few commemorative items to remember our trip by while we were visiting. We stayed at one of the

Disney Springs hotels, though I missed having my girls with us. We had a great time - delicious meals, enjoyed touring the hotels, and of course, the decorations and Christmas cheer was all around us.



This year, I was thinking, would probably be our last in our home in Irmo; our plan was to move upstate once Amber graduated. The girls helped prepare, and we hosted; we enjoyed having everyone come to the house. It was bittersweet - I love that home. So many memories. So many Christmas mornings of the girls meeting me at the stairwell to explore the gifts that



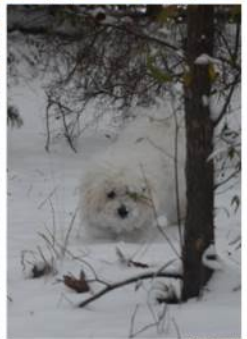
morning. Little puppies opening their stockings; fun decorations throughout the house. I was starting to get a little emotional about all the changes I knew the year would bring. We enjoyed Christmas with our family, both in Irmo and Sumter. We even had time to sneak a peak at the lights on Swan Lake - beautiful!



Don't know if you've noticed this "trend" but many parents of high school seniors seem to get a puppy or kitten. Piper jokes that Fynn was her emotional replacement when she left for college. We were good - no new puppies; however, we did purchase Gibbs - a yearling colt! Gibbs joins our family for a brief time while being trained by Steven, who will then find a more permanent match for him. However, I love visiting him in the barn; petting him and watching his ears prick up when I call his name. Such a sweet boy!



A child's senior year is filled with milestone events - Amber participated in her last Interscholastic Equestrian Association (IEA) regular season show in January. She received her points to move forward for Regionals and has loved her 7-year experience as an IEA rider; she has also loved the last 10 years as a part of IEA through Piper's riding as well. IEA is a great organization to get kids involved in horseback riding if you don't own a horse; they learn so much. Many thanks to Coach Jenny King for all the opportunities.



Meanwhile, SC received a somewhat unexpected snowfall. It was Fynn's first snow and, when I thought about it, realized it was also Oreo's first real snow as well. The two dogs loved it so much! Snowball loves snow also, but it mats in his fur and takes forever to melt away once he's inside. Snow is always a treat down South!



Piper decided to dig out all her ski gear and she and her friends enjoyed the snow on Anderson's campus! They had a ball, turning cardboard boxes into makeshift sleds for going down the hill.



Throughout the year, Amber had many academic achievements - one was to be asked to be a Presidential Fellow and compete for a full scholarship to Anderson University. What an honor! Amber was one of the elite few students who was invited by the university to compete. It was a wonderful day of interviews, information, and fun family times as I changed from professor to parent that day on campus. After taking the scholars tour, learning about the honors program, meeting with Dr. K to talk about all the pre-vet opportunities, knowing she'd taken four coding classes



with me (and having gained a certificate in coding from AU) and talked with the cybersecurity folks, Anderson had moved up in her consideration to one of the top two schools to attend; but Oklahoma State still held her heart. We had a wonderful day, and she learned a lot about the campus; then we got to visit with Piper before heading back to Irmo.



Amber also participated in Hammond's Public Policy for Social Change (PPSC) club. This academic group begins research as high school freshmen on a project to educate their fellow high school students on things that need to change. While many begin the program, few complete it. The program started when Piper was of age and her class was the first to complete it. Then, COVID hit; Amber's class is the next one to complete the requirements. Amber's topic was on plastic pollution. After researching it and working on suggested solutions throughout their high school years, each student that completes the program gives a speech during the Academic Showcase at Hammond; they also receive a special pin for graduation. Eight of her class completed the requirements and gave talks that day. Topics included Political Polarization, Alternatives to Plastic Pollution, School as a second Home, Life of College Prep Students, Data Analysis and how it can be skewed, Autism Treatment, Foster Care, and Clean Air. Amber attacked plastic pollution with a vengeance, bringing to light the issue and possible alternatives people can take to help save our environment. These young people certainly have bright futures as they look to improve the world around them.



The goal of this signature Hammond program is to empower students to change the world. They complete specific curricular goals, outreach, internship, and extra-curricular requirements to obtain this distinction as a PPSC graduate. The speeches were all well thought out and researched and given with confidence and clarity by each student. So proud of Amber, Merritt, Abby, Amelia, Sylvia, Alden, Emi, and Lyndsay as they completed this program.



As we began a new year, I knew in my mother's heart that Amber's horse show days were coming to a close - she did not plan to ride in college and so with each horse show on the calendar, I began to wonder if that would be our last one. We prepped for horse shows and enjoyed riding at the barn; loved that little Bristol helped "feed" the horses (and Amber). She'd sit in the feed bucket and hand us the grain. So cute!



At the end of January, we headed down to Georgia and had a fun weekend with our barn family. Smiley was our sweet boy and we got to pet Ellington's baby goat - the mama goat didn't want it, so Bradleann was bottle feeding the little thing when it was first born. It made it but followed her around - since she was now it's "mama." Cutest little thing!

On our way home from the show, we stopped for the first time at that newest of American things to do - a "Buc-ee's". Never in my life have I seen a gas station like that. It is definitely something to check off your to-do list if you've never been to one.



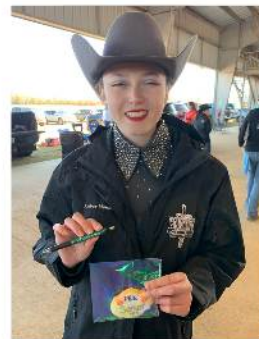
From their very first Valentine's Day, in addition to getting me flowers, Lee had gotten flowers for the girls; each receives a pink rose from Daddy. Even after she went to college, Piper continued to receive her rose. :) Amber, who loved her makeup, made the cutest little hearts on her eyes for the occasion - I have no idea how she does that!



After 10 years as a part of the IEA family and 7 years as a rider, Amber participated in her very last IEA Regional finals in late February. It was so sweet that they had a special gift and ceremony for the IEA seniors; Amber has ridden with/against most of the ones from our region through the years. Such a special season, she was on King's team this year and on the same team with Kaitlyn; she and Amber both made it to Nationals their first year (in 6th grade) and went out to Kentucky to compete - the only two from their bracket that year. At the end of the day, these girls were to head to Nationals together one last time. And the way it worked out, several of Amber's friends, both competitors and teammates, were to make their way to Pennsylvania in the spring for National finals. Such a special way to end her high school IEA riding career - but we had even more in store with IEA when Nationals hit in April.



Enjoyed being one of three seniors on King Show Horses and dinner with the team. It was a fun and wonderful experience! Thankful for all the memories!



The next weekend, we went to Jacksonville for the Florida Classic Reining show - Amber took Smiley and had a great weekend, bringing home several fun prizes. However, I was on edge; with each passing show, I started wondering if it was our last one - as Amber's responsibilities as a senior mounted, her time at the barn got less and less and I knew she did not plan to ride in college. I have loved the shows as much as the girls and knew how much I'd miss it. We have a wonderful barn family at Marbry Performance Horses and I was feeling very unsure of what our future would hold. Amber enjoyed her time in Florida and we all enjoyed time with our friends and with Smiley.

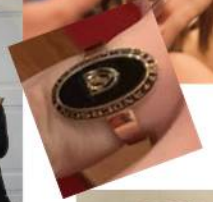




The Classic did not disappoint - lots of fun times with friends. I will miss Jacksonville.



The other bittersweet part of that weekend was that Anderson University's annual ring ceremony was that Friday; I couldn't leave Amber alone in Jacksonville and regretted not being able to split in two and be in two places at once; however, Lee stayed with Piper while Amber and I were down South. Such a sweet ceremony (glad they videoed it) and such a beautiful ring. One more step toward Piper's college graduation!



Amber was also picking out a class ring; Hammond has a few designs and she hunted one that incorporated her sport - both horsemanship and reining. She found it and the company was happy to add it to her class ring. Beautiful!



With March came OSU's accepted students' day and, while Amber was still considering her options, her heart loved OSU. She and I took a flight out to Oklahoma, and we headed to Stillwater to learn more about campus life and all OSU could offer. The main drawback was that it was 1000 miles from home, and she had some nice offers from Anderson and St. Andrews; Clemson and UGA were soon to follow. While this Mama's heart was really pulling for Anderson, I could see in her the love of OSU. She also kept gaining more and more scholarships, increasing her already high ACT scores. Her hard work was paying off and OSU had many interesting programs that were so very appealing.



Meanwhile, Piper was missing beach living, I suppose, and she wanted to take her friends back down to St. Augustine to have a turn at surfing, see her Marineland friends, and enjoy the beach for spring break. They had a blast!



The end of an era - we purchased an awesome Toyota Tundra for Piper when she was sweet 16 so she could haul her horse. Amber inherited it when Piper went to college and was passed Lee's Highlander for use at school; now, with Amber planning to head off to college, she, too, needed an upgrade. We sold the Tundra to Ellington and looked for a used car, which was difficult to find. So, we called Leon Johnson at Sparks Toyota down at Myrtle Beach and he had exactly what we were looking for. We talked back and forth



on the price and then headed down to the coast. Piper had just returned from Spring break, so she was a little reluctant to take a 3-hour trip, but we talked her into it with a dinner at Sea Captains House as the reward. Because we were getting tight on time, after a test drive, the girls left us to do the mundane paperwork and went shopping for prom dresses - and Amber found the one she loved. So, we came home with a RAV 4 and a beautiful dress, as well as full tummies - the Sea Captains House in Myrtle Beach never fails.



Since Amber was soon to leave for college, I also knew my days were going to look different. We've been going back and forth to a barn since she was five years old. So, I talked Steven into a reining lesson and good ol' Petey was my ride. He did great by me! He didn't want to go too fast (and neither did I) but he got me back in the saddle. Steven even let me spin him - my first time spinning a reiner! I may have the bug. Now, I just need to get back in shape!

It also meant that it was time to let go of the horse trailer. We got that not long after the truck and this little trailer had been good to us; however, sitting in the field unused for a couple of years had taken its toll, and we needed to do some repairs - Steven to the rescue again. He welded several things back tight and made sure it was ready for its next owner. It sold quickly and we were now less a truck and trailer, but still had two horses - Fancy, still at St. Andrews, and Smiley at Steven's.



Just because Fancy and Duke are at St. Andrews doesn't mean that we don't miss them - went for a visit and took some fly sheets and they looked great! Love that they take such good care of our sweet horses, giving them a job and a happy life. Duke is one of their stars!



Each year, from fourth grade through their senior year, Hammond takes the students on some amazing trips. There could be none more amazing than the traditional junior year trip to Costa Rica. Piper had chosen not to go (she went on a mission trip to the Dominican that year instead), but Amber was so excited for the trip! Unfortunately, when Amber was a junior, COVID restrictions stopped this trip (that had been happening over 15 years) from taking place. It was the first year without a trip for the class for Amber (she barely got in her sophomore trip - about 2 weeks before the world shut down). However, Steven Hillard worked hard to return the trip to Hammond's itinerary and invited the Seniors to take part with the juniors, so off to Costa Rica they went. I have to give him so many accolades here, as he managed twice the number of kids, kept the juniors and seniors separate from each other so each class could have their special trip, all in the same week (Spring break) going to the same locations, doing the same amazing things on different timetables. It was a once-in-a-lifetime type of experience!



The morning of departure, we arrived at Hammond at 2:40am and busses were getting loaded, Mr. Lumpkin was collecting passports, and there were SOOO many excited Seniors I can't even describe it! With a quick hug good-bye, Amber set off on the adventure of a life-time; loading her bag in the storage area, grasping her backpack, and hopping on board to head out for her first trip out of the country. There was electricity in the air and even though it was 2:40am, there was so much excitement and anticipation for this adventure! Seniors left at a different time than Juniors from the school so it would feel like a separate trip; after they arrived in Costa Rica and made it through customs, they were also divided into three groups to participate in three main activities while they were there. Amber was in group "Chiky Chiky!" which quickly hit the road for their first adventure.



Her group's chaperones from Hammond were Dr. Ruehlen and Senora Lipsitz; Costa Rican faculty were Liz, Luis, and they were driven by the skilled Carlos! Amber's first experience was at a beautiful resort, filled with waterfall swimming pools and Costa Rican beauty. They arrived and had a great dinner before getting some rest that night.

DELTA BOOK CHECK IN MY TRIPS FLIGHT STATUS Travel Info SkyMiles News Help? SIGN UP 100M

Atlanta, GA (ATL) - San Jose, Costa Rica (SJO)

Depart: Atlanta, GA (ATL) 9:53am Arrive: San Jose, Costa Rica (SJO) 12:18pm

Class: E7

Schedule: ATL - SJO

International Delta

All dates and times are local for the airport listed.



The next morning, the group headed over to be pushed out of their comfort zone - zip-lining over 250 feet in the air over the beautiful forests and mountains of Costa Rica, with a volcano at their backs! I don't know that I could have done it, but Amber was all in! This was followed by a nature/lava hike at "Parque Nacional Volcan Arenal" where they walked on new rocks made recently from the lava from the volcano. Amber found a rock that she loved - said it was the perfect rock! They ended day 1 with a great dinner. I was so thankful for the amazing blog set up as well as all the photos that the chaperones were taking to keep us parents in the loop and let us share in their adventures. However, after one post, group 3 seemed to disappear! After some initial concern, we learned that their adventure was on a nature island working with sea turtle research and there was just no Internet. I was so excited for Amber's turn with that!



Local wildlife was also pretty amazing!



The next day, Chiky Chiky was led to another area where they got to rappel! It was the groups favorite "so far" experience, dropping from 170 foot cliffs strapped in with ropes - terrifying and exhilarating! After "falling through the mountains," they went to some hot springs, had strawberry (virgin) daiquiris, and looked forward to rafting the next day, hoping for rain as rain was said to enhance the experience. They rafted down the Pacuare River and loved it!





They closed the evening in the hot springs and resort's pool before heading to their next adventure.



Then, they were off to their next location/ adventure - "Tres Equis". Group 1 was to help with a service project, working at a local school to help rebuild a soccer field. There were no slackers here, as the group dug holes and trenches through rock filled land, mixed and filled concrete, and enjoyed working at the school that over the years, Hammond has done many service projects for. It wasn't all



work, however - they did get to kick the balls around with some of the local kids (who apparently are MUCH better than the Hammond folks!) Amber loved working with the kids there. They had left the resort and were staying in the dorms at that facility. The three groups stayed in three different facilities while there - luxury nice, normal, and "no air conditioning, no hot water, bugs everywhere" natural. These groups went from one extreme to the other as they traveled through the week.





Mixing cement, digging trenches, being fed by local workers, and enjoying the view of the local mountains and a volcano - what an experience! Ending the day with a tour of the city and playing soccer with the kids was also fun for these Hammond seniors. Love that they got to give back to a local community.



So blessed and thankful to the chaperones for taking all these wonderful photos! Lots more are on the Shutterfly site where this newsletter can also be viewed.



The last location of Amber's group was the one she'd most looked forward to - working with and helping with researching the sea turtles at the Pacuare Research Reserve. What an amazing experience! The group traveled to an island where sea turtles come to nest. Each night, the group divided into three different times and would help patrol the beaches throughout the night, looking for a nesting female. Their job was to wait for her to go into the trance they do when they start to lay and then take measurements of her and collect the eggs to be transported to a safe facility to be hatched out and then the babies released. This is to protect them from local predators (crabs, gulls, foxes, etc.) as well as poachers. No photos of the night patrol (no lights - lights can alter the paths of the turtles and cause them to lay in a bad area or even retreat into the ocean and not lay at all). "Lights Out" to protect the turtles! The group started with some classroom training (always

learning) and then went to the beach to practice on a "sand turtle" the day before to know what to do if they were lucky enough to see them that evening. Amber was lucky enough! What an amazing experience - she said that to feel her flippers and the power there was incredible. Amber also held the bag beneath her to collect the eggs as she was laying. Amber got to help with a couple of turtles - so blessed! Their group saved hundreds of eggs over the two nights there.



During the day, after catching some sleep, the groups also got to explore the island, going to a local place for food, souvenirs, and dancing. One of their Costa Rican faculty (Liz?) showed them how the juice from one of the fruits there could actually die the skin, making temporary tatoos. Amber was delighted to get two of these! They drank from coconuts too! Amber said the food was amazing - so fresh and delicious. The last morning, before leaving, they went on a nature walk to see some of the native wildlife. What an incredible adventure. Then, they headed back to San Jose toward the airport for the trip home.

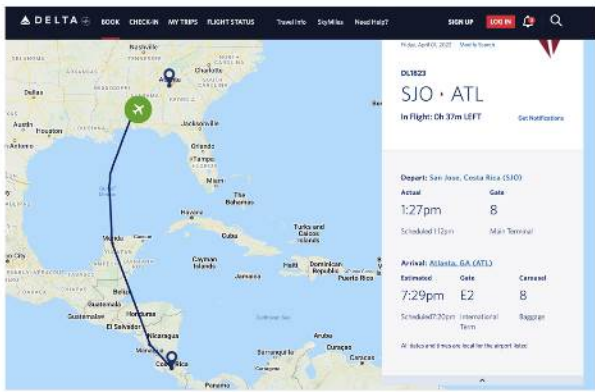






The 1st night in San Jose was filled with fun - Amber's group was happy to once again find hot water and after cleaning up had dinner and shared good-byes with the Costa Rican staff. They were excited to come home the next day.





Lee and I were so excited to go and pick up our baby from her trip. Once home she shared gifts she'd brought back, was loved on by the pups, showed us her tattoos, and introduced us to the "amazing Spanish bug itch cream" she found. What a wonderful adventure to end her senior year! Once-in-a-lifetime!



Piper and John were having their own adventures - spending weekends with friends, family, and each other and enjoying hiking and meeting John's new niece! So cute! Meanwhile, couldn't resist adding this cute photo of Oreo and his polka-dotted paws!



For the previous couple of months, I'd been hearing a weird crackling in my ear; at first, thinking it was water in the ear, I waited for it to dissipate; then saw a doctor; then went back; then a specialist. Unfortunately, I have tinnitus - a condition where there will always be a background sound in my ear. Once I had a diagnosis, it seems to have gotten better; at least it doesn't drive me nuts wondering what it is anymore. It comes and goes, and some days are better than others, but I don't hear as well as I once did. Apparently, my own brain is making the sound, so distraction is key - white noise is my friend as it quiets the sound I hear throughout the day.



Amber and Nate were getting excited - two proms to attend and two sets of friends to introduce each other to; however, the morning of Hammond's prom, Nate called and had taken ill. Amber was disappointed but happy to attend her prom with her friends and had a great time. She once again went to Camille's home after the prom for a great night with her friends and looked forward to Nate's prom at Thomas Sumter.





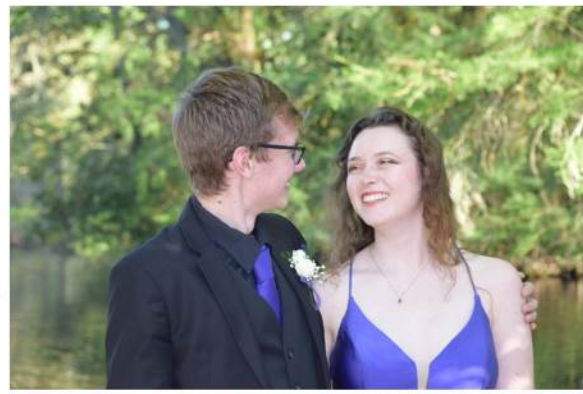
Some colleges have what they call a "rolling admission" process - students find out quickly if they were accepted or not and the talks with financial aid can begin; other schools send out their acceptances on specific dates. No idea why they wait, as it hampers the students if they really wanted to go to that school and if it was just a contender, the schools miss out on great students. However, in the spring, Clemson and UGA finally got their letters in the mail and Amber was five for five on college acceptances with nice offers from each school as well as several honors admissions. So blessed; she could not have made a wrong decision; however, from the day she walked on campus, OSU had her heart. It was a difficult decision; she loved Dr. K and Mrs. Carla at St. Andrews University and would have had a great pre-vet experience there while riding for the team; she loved AU's Dr. K and was impressed with the Christian atmosphere and strong pre-vet, cyber, and coding programs offered there; she has many friends at both UGA and Clemson; however, her heart was in Oklahoma since December 2020. She is a Cowgirl, through and through and Lee and I were preparing to let our baby move 1000 miles from home as she pursues her dreams in the Honors College of OSU. **Pistol's Firing! Go Cowboys!**

Things started getting real, as Hammond students received their robes for graduation. How did this happen that fast?



Meanwhile, Piper completed the honors requirements for Anderson with her own graduation coming up. While she could have also graduated a year early in May, at my request, she will graduate in December. I didn't want both children graduating at the same time, and I value the college experience too much to cut it short. I suggested she add a minor, so in December, Piper will graduate with honors from Anderson University with a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Science, minors in Business and Honors. She plans to follow her heart for Christ and applied for Crosspoint church's Generation LINK program, where she will work at the church (whichever church God leads her to) while taking classes online at Southeastern Seminary. She wanted to test the waters to be sure it was right for her (though she really already knew) and planned to go to the Summer LINK program and serve a church in Michigan this summer. Seeing her receive her honor's cords was such a special experience!

Amber got to go to three proms in her high school career; as Nate felt better, the two of them headed off to Thomas Sumter's prom. I'm an alumnus and it turns out that my high school friend, Tisha White's, daughter was also a senior and a friend of Nate's. So, we met at Swan Lake and got the fun friend pictures before the kids headed off to the prom. It was also really nice that Mom got to join us - living further away, she hasn't gotten to see the girls on the actual prom night before. So many memories!



This past April, Amber marked her 18th birthday. Time has certainly flown by, and this milestone birthday was wonderful. She's now officially an adult. We celebrated by taking lots of photos! With as many obligations as we had between work, school, and horse shows, we weren't sure how to schedule pictures; so, one afternoon, Amber and I took some in several different locations. Not bad, but I'm not a professional. I was still eager to find someone to take a more official version. Smiley wasn't sure about the graduation robe, but he was happy to slide with her in the OSU shirt. I was saving that photo for something special... Snagged a few with Piper also - she loves Steven's cat!





With Easter quickly following, it was nice to celebrate Amber's birthday with family and friends. We especially loved having Lynne come to visit with Aunt Nell and Kim. We gathered around the cross Lee made during COVID for a nice family photo in front of the house.



Each senior at Hammond is required to give a senior speech as a part of graduation requirements. The topic can be anything they like, and Amber decided to talk about Smiley. She explained all about quarter horses, reining, and her sport. It was a lot of fun and a great speech!

I was also so thankful to Bonnie Smith, who was able to get us in for graduation photos. Amber wanted some with the pups at her Nana and Granddaddy's, but also some in a location - we chose the botanical gardens at Riverbanks Zoo. After taking lots of photos in the gardens and down the back woods path, we got a few fun shots with some Dippin' Dots, otters, flamingos, etc. Thank you, Bonnie - I will treasure them always!





During January, Amber had taken her resume to several veterinary practices, but it was difficult to get an interview, as she was still in high school. Fortunately, through Hammond, she met alumnus Dr. Otis, who is a vet at Shandon Wood Veterinary practice across town; he invited her to apply there, and she did - and when the interviewer saw all her work with horses, the zoo, and the wildlife center, they hired her on the spot - not to clean, but to be an actual veterinary assistant! Those years of volunteering had paid off. She was to begin work right after graduation and was so very excited! Many thanks to Dr. Otis for getting her foot in the door. She would be working with animals and clients - the vet's right-hand during the day. She was so grateful for the opportunity.

Before heading down to IEA Nationals, Amber received a very special email - she was one of 5 Western scholarship recipients! All senior western riders (going



to Nationals or not) could apply and she was blessed to be chosen. She was the second Meeker to receive the honor, as Piper received her scholarship 3 years

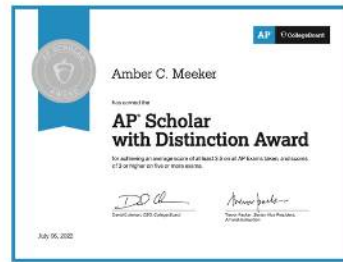


before. We didn't know until we arrived which scholarship she received, but it was the highest amount given! So proud! While I did wish that Nationals could have been in OK her senior year, PA made everyone so welcome and it was such a nice facility. So many of Amber's Region 4 senior friends were also riding - such a great way to end 7 years of membership. Marci (who rides for CCET) rode with us and King Show sort of adopted her for some of the opening events. Kaitlyn and Kinsey on King with Amber were the three seniors representing! Kate, from Flamekissed, was also there. IEA made it special for seniors,

with a lot of photo opportunities and a "senior corner" to enjoy. They made graduation caps and had lots of fun at the evening party. Amber and King Show Horses also rode well for Coach Jenny, ending up third in the nation for the year. One thing Amber promised the coach is to keep her elbows in - so she put a dime between her arm and her body. At the end of the ride, Amber still had the dime! She left with many hugs, lots of friends, and many happy memories. Making friends all over the SE and the country was Amber's favorite part of this organization. A wonderful way to end a wonderful membership with IEA.



Of course, two of Amber's AP tests were the day after she rode LAST in PA. There were no flights that would work, so when Amber finished riding, awards were given, photos were taken, (so, about 11pm), Lee and I took turns driving through the night to get her back in time for the afternoon exam (the morning exam, we had to makeup on a later date, though we did hit SC and our home at 7:30am with the exam to start at 8. It would not have been enough time). She took a quick shower to freshen up and drove herself to school. However, even after a long and exciting show weekend, driving all night getting car sleep, Amber excelled on her AP's, earning college credit for every single one - Chemistry, Physics, Calculus, and Government. Earned another AP award - "Scholar with Distinction!" So proud.



Hammond loves their traditions; the annual tradition of painting your skirt was interrupted with COVID and a new one began; to "Chalk your Decision". Since kids were home in 2020, that class received sidewalk chalk from Hammond and chalked the college of their choice on their home driveway. This tradition has made its way onto Hammond's campus as the kids this year chalked their decision on the sidewalks of Hammond. Since there are many that go to the same school, they tend to chalk one and sign all names; Amber was surprisingly not the only Hammond student to choose OSU as their school; English Edens was also planning to become a Cowgirl. Amber's friends Alysa (Elon) and Marci (UT Martin), Amelia (UC Boulder), and Camille (Purdue) were heading out on their own - didn't see others that were also attending those schools.



Skirt Day!!



The chalking decision was to replace the older tradition of painting skirts; however, many of the kids in this class really wanted to continue that one. They got together at each other's homes (Amber went to Alysa's) and word got around on the day they would all wear them to campus. The boys wore white shirts and just like when they were in the lower school, wrote on the shirts while the girls wore their painted skirts. Love all the traditions; the countdown to graduation was getting more and more real.





About this time, Piper had also completed her Spring semester exams and was excited to soon leave on a Maymester trip. We got everything out of her apartment and headed home for a brief time before her trip.



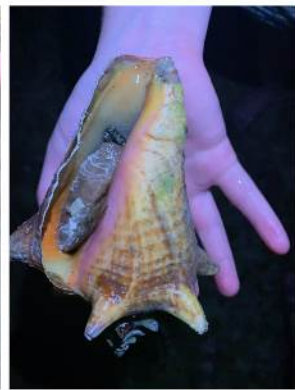
The ZooTeen's also celebrated the end of their season and, while Amber hoped to work in the summer, it was not possible with her job as a Vet Tech. She and the other seniors were recognized for all their efforts, and we had a great time playing games and enjoying the zoo together. So many hours spent with the ZooTeens. Again, so many emotions.

More and more, telemarketers were taking over our home number so we let it go to the answering machine most of the time. Little Snowball really hated the sound it made and would just howl and howl! Poor little thing! But it's so cute!





This past spring, Piper joined her Subtropical Ecosystems class in a trip to Pigeon Key, FL to see the biodiversity there. What a wonderful way to end a fun course - seeing first hand how coral reefs affect marsh and mangrove ecosystems and experience the wonder of it all. Learning about the conservation efforts there and getting a better understanding of how ocean's work, effects of pollution, and how it all affects our future was such a gift for these students. What a great trip!



Hammond awards day also brought special memories as Amber received her PPSC pin and honor's medal for graduation. While all high school grades are recognized, the seniors are the spotlight at awards day, and many were recognized for some amazing achievements. This year's senior class was a very special one.



Hammond believes in going full circle; the lower school always has a "fun day" of games the first Friday in May. Seniors now go through the lower school on their senior walk in the morning, then help the teams at each event. They also take their class pictures - in graduation robes and college t-shirts!





Another Hammond tradition is the annual cut-out party. Piper had not wished to have a cut-out, but Amber wanted one. Since the senior class had semi-adopted Smiley as a mascot, she asked me if she could have a photo with Smiley as her cut-out. I called the cut-out company, and they were excited to do it for us; however, the lady in charge of the party refused to allow it, wanting them all the same. So, since it was a fun tradition, we had the traditional cut-out made for her; however, as a special surprise we had an additional cut-out made of Amber and Smiley! It turned out so well. We went to the cut-out party with all the cut-outs and then had our Smiley cut-out at our personal grad party. Amber and Alysa hung out at the party and all the seniors took fun photos with their cutouts and cutouts of their friends. Fun tradition! Now, what do I do with them? I do enjoy that every time Piper walked into the room with it, she jumped, thinking Amber was there! It certainly looks real!

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Seniors also received their personalized annual from Hammond. A sweet and thoughtful tradition with their names embossed on their annual which they receive presented to them before the school. Each year, the annual is dedicated to a member of the staff/teacher that is special to the school. Mrs. Monique Thomas was the recipient this year! She is such a special lady who carefully directs traffic each day. She was so shocked and happy. Students also received a Hammond T with their nickname - Amber's was "Cherry"



Riverland Hills Baptist had their annual senior recognition Sunday where the seniors were announced as they crossed the stage and received some wise words from the pastor. Families enjoyed a nice luncheon afterwards and the church seniors got together this one last time also. Time was getting closer and closer to graduation.



Then, the seniors left on their annual trip; a last trip together where they go biking, rafting, climbing, and just enjoy some time together. Amber's class was the first class since 2020 to get to go on all the normal class trips. Thankful she was able to enjoy the experience.



The day before graduation, out came the tissues as the seniors were invited to the annual breakfast. Another tradition, the headmaster reads thoughts about each student that the teachers at the high school have given; a summary of the impressions left by each student. It's such a special moment. The teachers had the following to say about my sweet Amber:



*The teachers at Hammond know better than to tell Amber that something cannot be done - she has proven us wrong too many times in the past. Strong-minded, tenacious, and driven, once Amber determines a path, she does not deviate from it. What's amazing though is that her sheer will is always directed toward a noble goal, whether related to self-improvement or helping others. This is exhibited both in and outside the classroom as evidenced by her stellar grades, her many equestrian accomplishments, her dedication to working with animals, her gorgeous visual art, and her strong faith. Amber stands out as a student who has shown exceptional commitment to her goals. Amber, you are passionate, bright, and diligent, and we love your genuine commitment to learning and growing. We have been inspired by you and are so excited for you to thrive in the Honors College of Oklahoma State University. Congratulations.*

What thoughtful and caring words. The tissues left on the tables for the moms were certainly used that morning. Friends and families took a few last photos before graduation; the next day, they would all be high school graduates!







COVID changed many things; another was the location of Hammond graduation. It now takes place on the football field, which was nice, but a bit warm, even on an early May morning. Seniors gathered at the lower school before walking onto the field. After an inspiring speech, each senior walked across the stage to receive their diploma. All the teachers were there - so special that Amber's teacher from K4 got to watch as she walked across the stage. Mrs. Barret made sure to get photos of her "ladybugs" at every opportunity through the years and we are so thankful to her! Ladybugs for Life! Hammond offers the kids so many opportunities and lovely traditions that go full circle through the years. Lee and I feel blessed that we were able to give both our girls a wonderful education that prepared them well for the next stage of life.





Ladybugs  
for  
Life!



and... just like that... we had a high school graduate. We thank Hammond for 14 years of strong education, memories, and amazing opportunities. She's ready for her next step in life.



After graduation, we went back to the house to celebrate with family who had visited. Blessed to have Nana, and Granddaddy, Grandma, Aunt Nell, Aunt Jeanette, Aunt Rachel, Kim, Lynne, and my best friend Jennifer to celebrate. We had a great time sharing and catching up and taking some fun "photo-booth" type pictures with Amber and her cut outs. The next day, Amber's friends came for a celebration and party, and we had lots of fun again. So many memories! It was a great celebration.





Not one to slow down, Amber began her job as a vet tech at Shandon-Wood Animal Clinic the following Monday. She loved every minute of it. After the first week of getting to know her and training, the vets seemed to come to rely on Amber, who was given many responsibilities quickly. She was soon gathering patient information, holding, clipping toenails, preparing medication and shots, going over billing information, socializing strays brought in, taking notes, and all the other many responsibilities a vet tech is required to do. She worked 4 days/week at 10 hours/day which often went into overtime if there was an emergency. She also drove 30-40 minutes to get there, so she'd leave around 7am and get home around 7pm on workdays. It was difficult for her to have any down time, but she loved the work. Fynn, Oreo, and Snowball were very interested in all the new smells coming home on her shoes and clothes. So proud of all her accomplishments.



We headed to NC for what would be Amber's last NRHA show this year. She hadn't ridden in over two weeks and had just finished her first 41.5-hour work week, but we wanted to relax for the weekend. We had never showed in Williamston before, and it was a nice facility. We just showed on Saturday and had a great time. It was nice to see Amber and Smiley together. It was bittersweet, as we both knew it was probably the last show. While there were two additional choices, there was no time with work to practice and prepare and getting time off to go was also difficult. We relaxed Saturday evening and said goodbye to our friends Sunday morning. So many changes coming our way.



Surprises are all around us - as we were leaving one morning, I walked around the car and saw, in the garage, a small turtle; we often see these in the area, but I've never had one get trapped in our garage before. Felt so sorry for the little thing - had no idea how long he'd been in there, but we don't leave the doors open, so it must have been several days (we'd had it open for yard work earlier that week). Amber, wildlife rescuer to the rescue. Her time at Carolina Wildlife paid off as she and Piper quickly prepared lettuce, strawberries, and water on a small plate while we held the little fellow (who was hissing at us - did you know they hissed?). We placed him in a shaded area of the yard with the plate nearby. He ate and drank it all, seemed very happy, and left the yard on his way. God has made so many special little creatures for us to take care of in this world.



Along with Amber, our friend David also graduated, but in Texas. Wish we could have been there to celebrate his special day and that they could have been with us to celebrate Amber. But true friends are friends even when they are far apart. Best wishes to David as he was to start University of Texas at Austin in the fall!



As we were preparing for Amber's graduation trip, we were also getting ready to celebrate the wedding of a friend's daughter when tragedy almost struck. The dogs were rough housing as they tend to do on the screened porch and Oreo fell through the screen. He plunged down from our second story deck and landed (thankfully) in a bush before hitting the ground. Dazed, he sat there as Lee ran down to get him. We rushed him to the emergency vet, and they did all the tests. He seemed shaken but okay and thankfully nothing was broken. We were to leave the next day and were worried about leaving him, as we could not tell if there was any injury to his head (had no idea if he hit it on the way down) but our wonderful dog sitters Sherry and Dylan took great care of him and kept us up to speed on him while we were away. We love this little furball so much. Lee reinforced the screen and porch that night. No dog (or anyone else) will ever fall through it again.



We hated to miss the wedding but had to see to our little fellow; Piper, John, and Amber went to support their friend and watch her walk down the aisle while Lee and I took care of Oreo. Many congratulations to Cara and Alex! Crazy that Piper's friends are getting married! Little did we know... or did we?



When we asked Amber earlier this year (really last year) what she wanted for graduation, she said she really wanted a repeat of her Sweet-16 - a trip with her friends to Disney. Alysa and Marci were excited to go and with their parents' permission, we started making plans. In addition to the normal Disney fun, I wanted to plan a couple of special behind-the-scenes. We did the Keys to the Kingdom tour of the Magic Kingdom, where we got to go into the utilidors and learn some of the secrets behind the magic. Our last day was also a special one where we completed the Wild Africa Trek. I have to say, that was an amazing experience. We walked behind the scenes of the Kilimanjaro Safari, getting up close and personal (safely) to the hippos, crocodiles, big cats, and other animals of the Savannah there. In addition, we enjoyed the rides (with longer lines than back in 2020) and just having a great time together. We also were lucky enough to ride a new attraction, Guardians of the Galaxy, twice - old school stand in line and fastpass... what fun! We enjoyed our trip so very much. We also had great food, eating everyting INCLUDING the famous "Kitchen Sink" from Beaches and Creme. :) Marci was heading to UT Martin to ride on their equestrian team and Alysa to Elon. All three going to three different states in the fall. These are such good friends! I hope they always keep up with one another.







Speaking of college, Amber was excited to head to Orientation at OSU where she was to receive her fall class schedule and get to know the campus better. We were afraid we'd miss it, as Lee and I had a bout with COVID (he was very sick; I would never have known I had it without a test - strange and dangerous illness). Amber asked to go alone (?!) but instead, we got two last minute tickets on Delta (we'd planned to drive with Lee flying out to join us later) and headed to OKC. Amber met her roommate, Emily, who is a triplet. Emily and one of her brothers, Ethan, were headed to OSU and her third brother was going to college in Texas. It was great to meet their family. Emily's orientation was the weekend before Amber's, but we were able to meet in Oklahoma City as we were coming in and they were going home.





While at orientation, the kids in the Honor's College were first grouped together for a special meeting before the main orientation, which began to list their requirements and privileges. As colleges do, they separated the parents from the kids for parts of the day and when Amber was brought back together with us, we were greeted with not only Amber but several new friends. We found that many of the kids grouped together during orientation and went around together and all the parents then formed a similar group - we were all thankful that the kids had found friends and Lee and I were especially grateful for the kindness of offers to help Amber if she ever needed someone closer than 1000 miles away.

Amber had also signed up for Cowboy Camp, which happened after orientation; she stayed the weekend while Lee and I enjoyed a little time together in OKC (about an hour from Stillwater). The NRHA Derby was going on, so we dropped by the fair grounds to see some of Amber's friends who were there. Kate Muldrew was a welcome surprise, working for Jason



Vanlandingham. She was actually staying in the same hotel as we were, and it was great to see her. Kate was heading to UGA this fall. Amber got to come by and see her just before orientation began and they were laughing that they each had the same work shoes on - Hoka's are the best! Amber as a vet tech was on her feet all the time and Kate working to take care of the horses from early morning to late evening needed comfortable and sturdy support. Hoka's get both girls recommendation! At the close of Cowboy Camp, we headed back to South Carolina where Amber worked the remainder of the summer.



While we were in Oklahoma, Piper left for a summer mission trip through Crosspoint's SumerLink program. She and the team spent the summer in Ann Arbor, MI working in the community and witnessing for Christ. They served Treasuring Christ Church and helped with Vacation Bible School, college programs, and other aspects of the church. The team was down for about 10 days with their own bout of COVID; thankfully, Piper didn't get it. She loved Michigan - the people were great, but she especially loved all the wild flowers. She told us it was so green there - the water from the snow keeps the ground perfect for the grasses and flowers of the spring and summer. Piper has always loved wild flowers -

nothing makes her happier than to find a field and pick to her hearts content. The team did great work through the church and had a great experience. Many friends were made and blessings from God abounded.







With everything going on, this was the second year in my entire life that I was unable to join my family down for their annual beach trip. I hated to miss it, but Amber found a day or two between her work week to head down and visit. She got spoiled, of course, and enjoyed the beach. Piper and John got back barely in time to spend a day, stopping at Buc-ee's along the way to pick up matching bucket hats!

We'd gotten Mama and Daddy one of the quick set-up tents that use the wind to hold them up and it was much lighter and easier to set up for them than the traditional tent. A "Shibumi," I think.

Amber was so excited to shop for her dorm supplies; she and Emily had looked at several different orientations of the room and decided on where to place the beds and desks; so Amber headed out to shop for her "necessities" and had a great time!



With the girls growing up and doing their own things, Lee and I began to think about moving to the upstate. We both have worked there for 2-4 years now, and the commute was difficult; 1.5 hours there and back for Lee (3 hours/day) and 2 for me (4/day). We decided to list our home but did a few repairs first. Should have put it on the market right then, as we put it on just as interest rates were on the rise. We started packing up our life's treasures, and there were so many emotions. I love that house - it was perfect. After 11 years, it was difficult to even think of leaving. However, we needed to stop commuting. With the girls no longer in school, our work 2 hours away, and many other things, it just made sense. We listed the house.

I also started looking for a new one; many in the upstate were not really what we were looking for and I was concerned we couldn't find a home we liked; but then we did. We made the jump and closed just as our Irmo home went on the market and the real estate market slowed to a crawl. So, we are now owners of two homes. Hopefully, a wonderful family will want our Irmo home and we can pass it along. It's a beautiful place.

As we were in the middle of contract negotiations on the new home, Piper returned from Michigan. I was so happy to see her! John was the trip leader and there were several of the team that were members of First Baptist church of Columbia, so I picked Piper up there. So happy to see them all! So grateful for the experience!



Loved hearing the stories and seeing some of the photos from her summer. God has placed a servants heart in this sweet young lady!

We were also busy getting Amber ready for OKC - she wanted some "girl time" with Piper and I and took us to one of her favorite downtown Columbia spots. Yum!



Amber's last day as a vet tech went well; she was sad to leave these new friends and colleagues and has certainly earned her place among them. I'm so proud of the work she accomplished this summer. She was proving her Hammond teachers correct as the earlier speech made at the Senior breakfast was certainly holding true.



While new adventures are exciting, good-bye's are hard. Amber isn't very great at them; however, it was nice to see her friends once more before leaving for Oklahoma. They all got together for lunch and had fun talking, laughing, and hugging before they parted. This group was all going out of state - Colorado, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Illinois, and North Carolina. We went to the barn, saw friends nearby, and finally, the pups.



We teased Amber that she needed three cars loaded with stuff to get to Oklahoma. (Little did we know that we would eat our words - Piper also needed three cars for her last semester at AU and we needed three moving trucks to take our things to the new house later! Shouldn't have teased her!) We were packed and ready. Many thanks to Nate who helped load the cars the night before we left. He and Amber parted as good friends as he headed to Miami of Ohio for college. The dogs were probably the hardest for her to leave, as they really didn't understand that she wouldn't return for a while, but they certainly understand luggage and were not happy about seeing so much of it.

Mama and Daddy traveled with us to say good-bye and see the campus that had stolen her heart. After stopping to introduce Mama and Daddy to "Buc-ees" and at our favorite rest stop in Little Rock, "The Old Mill", we made it in the next day to Stillwater, OK. Amber loved showing them around the campus and was so excited to move in to her dorm room. She got to move in a few days before other freshmen because she was on the "BOD" - Board of Directors - and had to be trained for the expectations of the job. She was to help plan events for her dorm, Stout Hall, help with homecoming festivities, etc. She was so excited to take this next step! (The girls still love riding the luggage cart at hotels! Like that they are still so young at heart!)





Amber and Emily had planned out their dorm room - Amber moved in early, as she had applied and been accepted to the Residence life's Board of Directors. Her job was to plan events for Stout Hall during the semester

and help with activities like Homecoming decorations and other celebrations. She was excited with her light-up mushroom and her ivy-covered mirror. She set up her desk for both study and makeup (she considers makeup an act of artistic creativity) and with her amazing organizational skills got everything she took in a tiny closet. The only thing she couldn't get in was the futon - it came back home with us. The dorm plan she received didn't show a lower ceiling on 1/3 of the room and that took out the possibility of raising the bed to allow the futon. Oh, well. Emily arrived the next week with the frig and her own belongings and the girls have been great friends. The two have different activities but get together to share experiences at midnight before bed and were church hunting together. So happy they get along! Oh, college life.



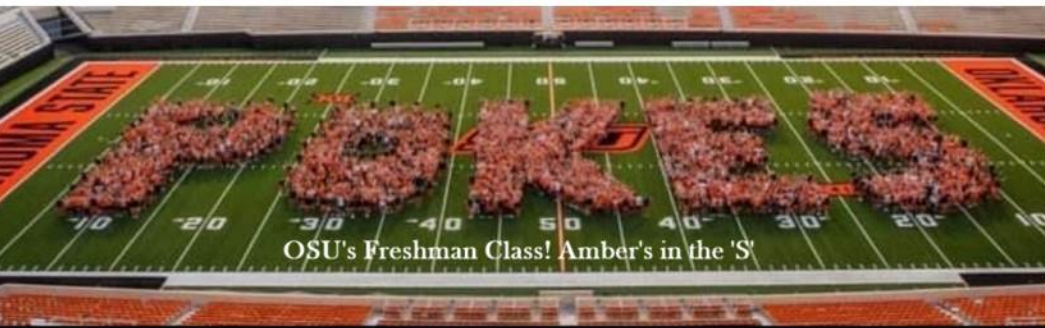
According to Amber's update, she had a great time during OSU's welcome week and working with the BOD (Board of Directors). She was excited to start the fall semester. She was in mainly upper-level sophomore/junior classes as she began to look at her desired major to see what else she could fit in to her four years of college to get the most out of it. She loves OSU, has a great group of friends around her, and found a church - Stillwater Bible. I was grateful she was happy and satisfied; it was a relief.



Meanwhile, Piper also had three cars full to take her back to move in at AU - her last semester. She was excited about December graduation and filled with dreams of a bright future. We were able to help her and enjoyed the process of putting her post cards on the wall one last time. She has cards of each of the national parks; her dream is to one day visit them all. We left her happy with her roommates in their Village apartment and headed back to Irmo.



So happy that the girls sent me a "first day of class" photo! My girls know how to make me happy!



OSU's Freshman Class! Amber's in the 'S'



While in MI, Piper found she loved Cherry Republic soda's. I was sending Amber a freshman care package and decided to send Piper a senior year one - two cartons! She shared with her post office buddies and enjoyed it so much!



Lee and I had started sleeping on an air mattress during the week (taking the dogs with us) at the new house and had brought a few things to Anderson. Not comfortable but helped with the commuting. One evening, John called and asked if he could come over (but asked us not to tell Piper). We knew what this must mean. This wonderful young man had been dating our daughter for just over two years. When John came, we went to the basement (the only room with chairs - at least sort of. One moon chair one small chair, and a bean bag) and he poured out his heart - he loved our daughter and felt that God had brought them together and together they could bring others to God. He asked us for our blessing. The hardest part was waiting - he was to ask Piper the next weekend at his parents' home in Kentucky on a previously planned trip. It was so hard to see her that week and not just burst. That next Saturday, we got an excited phone call from our sweet little girl. Time has flown and our baby is now a beautiful young woman, about to graduate college, and she's now engaged! She and John are so eager to get married; they wanted the wedding in January. Yes, January. Wow. What a lot to do!



First, I thought we should make sure that Pastor Ken (who they wanted to marry them) was available and we could find a venue. We toured Bleckley Inn and it was very nice, but to me seemed more for a reception than wedding; but they had a second venue - the Station. It was perfect. Both were available, so we have both booked for 1/21/23. John and Piper were thrilled with the location. Then, I called my friend Scott Warnock at Aberdeen Cattery. Aberdeen, under Jack Brantley's wonderful leadership, catered my and Lee's wedding years ago and our reception was at Scott's mom's home. He was so excited for us and he



and Beth (who run it now), happily sent over a list of food for us to look at. They, too, were available on that date.





Next was the dress. Piper and I drove to Charlotte but had no luck that day. It was fun to see and try on all the beautiful dresses and Piper narrowed down the type of gown she was looking for. Amber couldn't fly back but she FaceTimed in to share as much of the experience as she could. Then we went to Poinsett Bride in Greenville - Annilie was the perfect person to help us! She did a great job and after trying on a few more, Piper was ready to "say yes to the dress!"



Following that, everything fell into place - flowers, invitations, dress, friends as bridesmaids/groomsmen, music, rentals, and more. Bridal registries from four stores, videographers, dj's, and a string quartet rounded out some of the planning. My head (now November as I'm writing this) is still spinning a bit but things are all coming together. So happy for them both!



I shouldn't have teased the girls; it took, you guessed it, three moving trucks, to gather the majority of our treasures and furniture to our new home. We decided that sleeping on an air mattress during the week and going to Irmo on the weekends was not going to work. We moved the majority of our things in just after classes began at AU and have stopped traveling back and forth as much. We have nothing but thanks to Soda City Movers, who did a great job. My only wish was that their trucks were a little bigger, as it would have saved a bit of money if we could have used one or two instead of three, but they didn't scratch or hit a single wall. There were a couple of bumps on furniture, but overall, they did an awesome job. We weren't able to pack everything before the mover's deadline while working full time, but we have the majority of our things in Anderson now and are enjoying our new home. Now, to sell the old one.



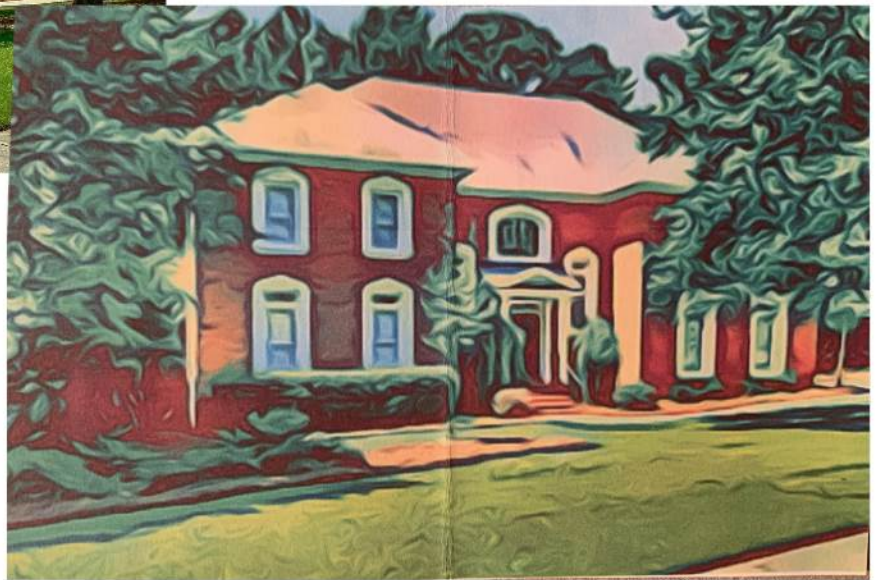
Amber started off great (but time pressure, I didn't get it every week) and sent a weekly text filled with her adventures at OSU. It was great to hear from her. She did keep up with smaller texts, but I did enjoy the big ones I got that were filled with news of a summary of her week. I also loved that she sent me pictures!

The day we found Piper's wedding dress was so fun! We'd gone to Charlotte to look the previous weekend but couldn't find "the one." Then, we visited Poinsett Bride in Greenville. Annilie was such a wonderful person to help us. Piper was so excited to find her dress. We called my mom to tell her, but something was wrong. She finally told me she'd fallen; passed out and fallen! My dad was at work, but he got to her quickly and took her to the ER, where they admitted her within 20 minutes. However, after four days and running every test known to be, all came back "normal." We don't know what caused the fall but are happy that she's home and it hasn't happened again.

So much change going on this year. So many emotions. Lee and I are certainly enjoying a shorter commute to work and love the style and layout of our new home. We have great new neighbors that we're looking forward to getting to know as well as fun new wildlife to enjoy, as we are close to a protected marsh. Coming home, I may see deer and squirrels (as I did in Ascot) but I also see wood chucks, beavers, and chipmunks! What fun! However, leaving a home of 11 years is so difficult. Each time I return to check on the house (still not sold...) and I think I'm over it, a wave of sadness hits me. I don't see empty counters, but counters filled with Thanksgiving and Easter dinners in my kitchen. I don't see a bare stairwell but two little excited faces at the top of the stairs, waiting for permission to see what Santa has brought. As I step into my empty family room, I close my eyes and hear little feet running in purple place. I miss watching the squirrels nest in the tree outside my bedroom window and I even miss the cardinal that mercilessly pecks on the bathroom window each Spring. The house seems sad with no pictures; Jose has our yard looking pristine - better than when we lived there, actually. My porch is just as peaceful. It brings tears every time, though I'm happy in our new home.



When I mentioned these feelings to Lee - how painful it was for me to leave the memories, he reminded me we have already started building memories in our new home. That it was there, in the basement, that our future son-in-law requested our blessing for Piper's hand in marriage. New memories to be made - upcoming, Thanksgiving, Piper's graduation and marriage, and Amber's latest adventures. Lee always knows what to say to make me feel better. A dear friend, Laurie, also sent me a lovely note with a beautiful rendition of our old home that she created for me. God has blessed me.





Piper turned 22 this year and we celebrated by meeting John at Clemson's botanical gardens for some fun engagement photos. I was frustrated that I couldn't find my camera; I'm hoping it somehow got into a storage unit we had, as I still haven't put my hands on it. However, Walmart actually had a semi-okay DSLR that took reasonable pics; so, we took several that day and had a great time. Both of them are so happy and so photogenic.



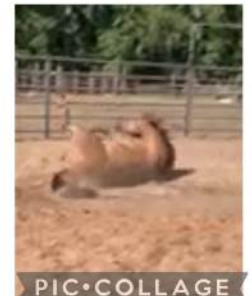
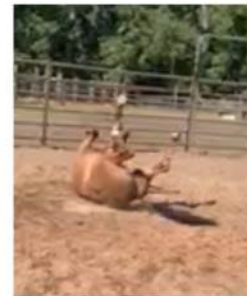


Lee and I celebrated 25 years together this year. We've had better and worse, richer and poorer, sickness and health. We've had happy times and sad times. We've been through an eclipse. We've lived through a pandemic. We've had and raised two beautiful children. Over the years, we've had Morgan, Tango, Snowball, Oreo, and Fynn (dogs), PC, Buttercup, and Samuel (birds), and Coosa, Duke, Fancy, Spook, Smiley, and Gibbs (horses). Lee didn't realize how many animals we'd have in our lives, but he's been a loving "dad" to them all. Our daughters have grown in Christ and in their own abilities as they move from children to women.

We've lost family members along the way, been to Disney close to 50 times as a family and traveled the country together. This year, we celebrated by moving to a new home and (as usual) spending time with our beautiful daughters - one as she moves to Oklahoma for her college years, and one as she closes her college years to move out into life with her own loving husband. It's been quite an adventure. As they say in Disney/Pixar's "Up" - "Adventure is Out There." We are on the next leg of ours now.



By the end of September, Amber had determined that she would just not have adequate time to spend with her friend and partner, Smiley. She told us we should let him go. I was broken hearted; Smiley is such a special horse. We told Steven to put him up for sale, but really didn't want to. After a day, we asked him to take him back off the market. Smiley is family. So, we have given him a vacation for now - he's living the life and being a horse. He enjoys rolling in the dirt and getting loved on by us for now. With so many other changes, I just really couldn't let him go. It may be selfish - he's a great athlete and partner; but he's also become a big part of our family.







Over AU's fall break, Lee and I grabbed a plane and took a trip to see Amber in Stillwater. It was so wonderful to see her! We had a lot to celebrate - first just seeing her felt like a celebration, but she also had been told that she was accepted to OSU's early admission program for the vet school. That means that, as long as she maintains the very long list of requirements throughout her undergraduate years, she will have a guaranteed seat in the vet school! What an honor! We also enjoyed meeting all her friends; we took most of them to Cattleman's to celebrate. Amber also introduced us to one of her favorite spots, Just Wafflin' and we enjoyed visiting her church, Stillwater Bible, with her Sunday morning before flying back home. She was also busy preparing for Homecoming



the next weekend - as a part of BOD, she was working on the sign for Stout Hall; she and her friend Jen designed, created, and painted it. She's really settled in; my only sad moment (other than when we left) was when she called OSU her "home." Before leaving, we got to see Brayton, the young man she's started dating, who had returned from a trip home. It was so wonderful to see her! We miss her but are so glad she's happy and settled.



With graduation approaching, Piper was thinking about her future. Her heart has always been with the Lord; since age four, she's felt a call to tell others about the saving grace of Jesus Christ. She has a gentle but strong spirit, and her deepest desire is to lead others to Christ and His saving grace. Piper applied to be a part of Generation LINK through Crosspoint Church. This program allows her a type of internship - working with one of the churches in the network while taking classes online through Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. She was so excited to be accepted to the program! So proud of her and her Christian heart.



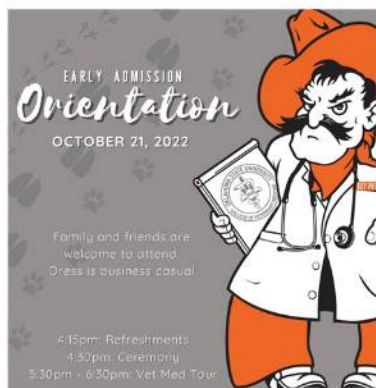
Meanwhile, with graduation, Christmas, and a wedding coming up, Piper and John were thinking about a place to call home after January 21st. After touring several places, they signed their lease! They will be residing near Crosspoint in the upstate of SC. So excited to have them close to us for a little while longer.

Friday, October 21st, Amber joined an elite group of students. OSU's School of Veterinary Medicine has a program that will admit freshman students attending universities in Oklahoma that meet their qualifications as early admission students. Amber was one of 40 students admitted - what an honor! When she completes the program and her undergraduate degree, she will have a guaranteed seat in their vet school.

In the US, there are only 38 schools of veterinary medicine: less than one/state. It is more difficult to get into vet school than any other medical school. As a SC resident, it is even more so, as SC does not have a vet school and the schools all give preference to students in their own state.

So proud of her! She has worked hard for this. Throughout high school, Amber interned at Riverbanks Zoo through their ZooTeen Program, volunteered at the Carolina Wildlife Center to help rehabilitate injured and sick animals, and worked full time as a vet tech last summer at Shandon-Wood Animal Clinic. She completed a week-long clinic through St. Andrews University the previous summer, and has also been a part of every vet visit she could with her horses, learning how to care for them, give shots, bandage wounds, etc. Dreams can come true with hard work! God has blessed her! So proud of her!

May God continue to bless and keep her as she moves down this path!



The evening of Amber's orientation into the School of Veterinary Medicine was the day before OSU's annual Homecoming celebration. The students had been preparing for this for quite a while - there were plays, competitions, signs, parades, and (of course) pumping of all the amazing floats. OSU claims the largest celebration in the country and I'd have to agree - everything was a sea of orange and there were thousands of people walking fraternity/sorority row, by the fountain and library, and having a great time! I haven't been a part of a homecoming in a long time and OSU certainly did it right. I hated that I had so little time, but having just gone the previous weekend, the cheapest flight left Saturday morning so I stayed as late as I could and then drove back to my airport hotel in Oklahoma City late that night. OSU certainly does it right!



We also needed to find a great wedding cake - wanted our guests to enjoy that! Bonnie Brunt Cakes were highly recommended. She did not disappoint! We tried nine different flavors of cakes, and fillings/icings. Piper and John enjoyed trying the different ones, as did Lee and I. In the end, they have chosen three delicious flavor combinations. Before choosing, I asked them to write down their choices separately. Except for one filling, they matched perfectly on all six! (3 cake flavors, 3 filling flavors). What fun!



As November began, we put some final touches on wedding planning and contracted with the final vendors for the wedding. Then, the questions from those vendors needed answers and we had to go back into more thought to figure everything out. John and Piper went to a local shop to order the tuxedos and John was measured; invitations were addressed, stamped, and mailed. Things are coming together!



In early November, our hearts were heavy for many friends; our friend's Lisa and Wayne lost Lisa's dad and the visitation/funeral were planned; my dear friend Jennifer lost her beloved cat and companion of many, many years just a month after she had lost her other one unexpectedly. My college mentor and later colleague Hayden Porter passed away, and our dear friend Sabrina lost her mom in a tragic accident. Whether expected or sudden, death is difficult. In addition, a friend tore her ACL and my dad ended up in the ER with the flu. The next week, my mom caught it as well. Also, my high school friend and cousin's husband, Wade Payne, passed away after a valiant battle with a long illness. This was certainly not the best time of year. Earlier this year (June) we also learned of Clint Bryson's death; so many memories with him at Thanksgiving and Christmas. Through COVID we had missed his visits and will miss him in years to come. May God be with those who are sick and grieving.



The Saturday before Thanksgiving, Amber came home from OSU for the first time since leaving in August; she was coming to a new home, where she'd never lived, so I wanted to make it feel as much like home as I could. Piper and I worked to unload boxes into her really organized room, as she was careful to organize her room before leaving the state. I took photos of her drawers and bookcase to try to honor her organization scheme and we got most everything right (though she did notice three books on the wrong shelf...). It was so wonderful to see her at the airport - Smiley, Oreo, Snowball, and Fynn were equally excited! We also teased my mom that we FINALLY got "Nana" into an airport! (But just as far as baggage claim!)



Piper came to visit but was still in classes; however, Tuesday evening, she and John came over for a nice dinner and we all had a wonderful time together. John was to leave for Kentucky the next day and Piper stayed home with us for the holiday. This year, at Thanksgiving, I was most thankful to have my entire family in my home! Mama and Daddy came up on Wednesday and Lee picked up the cake and Mom the same day. Wednesday evening through Saturday morning, we enjoyed family time together. On the way back from visiting with her mom, my friend Jen came and toured the new house and got to visit before heading home to Charleston. So wonderful to see her! It was a welcome, relaxing, and (much needed) fun time. I enjoyed it so much that it was hard to think about Sunday, when Amber's plane would take her back to Oklahoma. I was very thankful for her friend Jen's parents, who dropped her off at the Oklahoma City airport; her first plane ride alone had gone off without a hitch, but I was worried that she was alone in the Atlanta airport; but she navigated it well! Jen's parents were going to pick her up as well. Thankful for friends and family this year!





It was so fun to spoil the girls a little bit - giving "beach style" breakfasts each morning - from grits, sausage, eggs, bacon, and biscuits to Belgian waffles, to the traditional "orange rolls" on the morning of Thanksgiving. Then, the normal feast! Feeling so blessed that we have an additional bedroom in the new home, so Mom has a room, Mama and Daddy have a room, and the

girls each have a room - we had everyone there! Makes me so happy! We had bridesmaid and grandmother-of-the-bride dresses altered during the week and Lee was fitted for his tux while we did some shopping of our own. Black Friday, Amber and Piper went shopping with friend Alysa and I got to show my friend Jen our new home on her way from Atlanta to Charleston. The sad part was when they all went back to college, Irmo, and Sumter. Lee and I were back to being alone in our home again; but Piper and John are close enough to visit often, which is wonderful.



Bridal showers began and they were so fun! Piper had a beautiful and fun shower given by her AU friends filled with charcuterie, rose gold decor, and games! Another nice brunch shower was given for both Piper and John from Crosspoint. They are so loved! In addition, wedding gifts have started coming to the house and Piper and John were delighted to receive an envelope addressed to "Mr. and Mrs. Giuliani." Things are getting real for them!



Piper and John's small group at Crosspoint gave them a lovely shower. It was so nice for our families to start meeting one another!





And then there's this... we will close the newsletter with Piper's upcoming graduation from AU - a week after the printing of this letter, she will graduate with honors from Anderson University with a BS in Environmental Science, minors in Business and Honors. She will begin Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and the Generation LINK program in January and look forward to her upcoming marriage. Time has gone so quickly!



So proud of her servant's heart, humble spirit, and desire to do God's work. Praying He blesses her as a light to Him, stays with her as she moves through life, and guides her as she steps out into this world. May she lead many to God!



After Amber went back to OSU to complete her first semester and take her exams, a package arrived in the mail - addressed to the old house. In it, were her prizes - she was Reserve Youth 14-18 Champion for the year in FRHA. She was also 4th in Green 2 (and only showed in Green once!). So proud of all her equestrian accomplishments! Thanks to FRHA for the beautiful leather spur straps and top 5 bag!



Wow - I believe this is my largest Christmas letter to date - we did way too much this past year. But so many exciting things are happening that I wanted to do them justice. I suspect next year's will have lots of photos to share as well! We wish you and your families a very Merry Christmas. Remember the reason for the season and put Christ first in your celebrations. May you have peace and joy during the Christmas Season and we wish you many blessings on the New Year!

***Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!***

***Love,***

***Lee, Paige, Piper, Amber,***



***Snowball, Oreo, Fynn,***



***Fancy, Smiley,  
Gibbs,***



***and our  
sweet  
Duke***