

MERRY CHRISTMAS

AROUND the FIRE

Winter 2023

RESCUE the Equine ★ MENTOR the Child ★ HOPE for the Family ★ EMPOWER the Ministry

LOVING RANSOM AND REDEMPTION

By Kim Meeder

It was a quiet springtime evening. The work of the day was laid to rest and I gave my mind a mini-respite by “treasure hunting” through the local craigslist ads. I scrolled through the farm and garden section, passively looking for items that the Ranch might need. I also enjoyed looking at the various horse photos. What is normally relaxing and fun . . . suddenly shifted. My eyes locked onto a single photograph. I could not look away. I could not move forward. I could not unsee what I was seeing.

All I could do was stop and stare.

In the wake of my abrupt halt, I could sense what felt like train cars painfully colliding inside my heart. I enlarged the picture and studied every feature. I could feel my brow furrow and I was subconsciously leaning forward to see every horrifying detail.

Moving like a tattered survivor into my heart, a single thought emerged through the blackness of shock, “How? Lord Jesus, how could anyone *allow this to happen?*”

Captured within the brightly colored photo were two horses. Their heads were nearest to the photographer and held low so their spines were the focus of the shot.

When looking down their backs—instead of seeing two bodies that were well rounded with normal muscle—this picture showed just the opposite. Instead, like a mute witness of their prolonged neglect, the top of their croup looked more like a forgotten tent pole left to hold up a sagging, rotten canvas. These horses were so emaciated that even the relative camouflage of their ragged winter coats could not hide the gruesome rise of their spines above their skeletal bodies.

In nearly three decades of equine rescue and rehabilitation, I had only encountered this severity level of starvation three times . . . and not all of those survived.

Sarah, the Ranch Equine Director was sitting next to me on the couch. Without words, I rotated my laptop toward her. I watched as her silent horrified response mirrored mine. With awareness of suffering comes responsibility. Compassion rushed into the plight of these completely helpless souls. Within that moment of understanding, we turned to our greatest action, our greatest weapon—*prayer*.

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Time was precious. Genuine compassion equals genuine action. We could not wait for a convenient time to fit into our already full schedules. The next morning, Sarah made the call and I hitched up the trailer. Deirdre, the Equine Coordinator, quickly joined our team as we climbed into the truck together. Everything was moved aside . . . because *life* was waning.

From the single photograph that had alerted us to their plight, the actual condition of the horses was unspeakably WORSE than any of us could have imagined.

Upon arrival, we learned that the taller, red and white paint was a 15-year-old mare and the smaller chestnut was a coming 2-year-old colt. The mare was so desperately thin that the skin covering where her rump *should* have been, hung like an old curtain, in loose, empty folds. A horse of normal weight has 8-10 inches of muscle on the inside of each thigh. This muscle naturally holds the hind legs in a strong and straight plumbline from the hip to the ground.

Appallingly, this mare had lost so much muscle that there was nothing beneath her tail but air. Because no muscle existed to correctly align her hind legs apart, the result was that her lower legs crossed. This caused her hind hooves to hit each other with every awkward step forward.

The tiny red colt also bore the full ravages of starvation. Unfortunately, he also had an ominous wound on the underside of his jaw, from which flowed a sticky stream of puss. Their need for rescue was unmistakable.

Without further examination or discussion, we quickly moved to pay in full the asking purchase price. Based on their dire states, it felt more like fulfilling a ransom.

With great care, our little team went to work. While I handled paperwork with the owner, I could see Sarah and Deirdre gently haltering the horses and guiding them toward the trailer. Not knowing what would happen next, we prayed.

The mare was first. She saw the open door and seemed to understand that this meant only one thing . . . freedom.

She didn't look right or left. She appeared to focus all her strength toward simply moving forward.

At the threshold of the trailer—without hesitation—she gave a herculean effort and lifted her front end up into the waiting salvation. But her diminishing strength failed as she tried to raise her hind legs. Her hind hoof slammed against the rubber bumper and she slipped hard. Undeterred, she crouched low until her weakened limbs followed her into the safety of the trailer. As Sarah led the exhausted mare to the front, I moved to the open window to take her lead rope so Sarah could secure the divider to help hold her up.

While tying off her lead rope, I was aware of how hard she was breathing. In her desperate condition, the exertion of

moving only 30 yards was nearly more than she could do.

We were cautioned that the colt had not been trailered much and his last trip was a fight. Again, we prayed. Unsure of how he would respond, Sarah also led the waif up to the floor and encouraged him to explore it. Instantly, he was less interested in the new smells and fixated on the few strands of hay that had fluttered down to within his reach. He seemed to recognize that this box held what he needed to live. Awkwardly—he also tried to step up. He missed his first attempt, but bravely pressed in and succeeded on his second try.

We secured the doors and carefully pulled away as if moving horses of glass. While I drove the familiar road back to the Ranch, Sarah and Deirdre made a flurry of phone calls to secure a Ranch team to prepare the quarantine/recovery paddock and to summon a veterinary crew for their immediate evaluation and care.

Upon examination, the primary vet expressed that within her entire career, she had never encountered horses in such extreme condition. On a standard Body Condition Scale (where 1 is the thinnest and 9 is the fattest), she gave each horse a BCS score of 1, the lowest score a horse can receive and still be alive.



Photo credit: Kim Meeder

Photo credit: @memilygreen

The vet also cautioned that the mare had a significant heart murmur and was actively in the process of dying. She determined that without intervention, the mare might have a few days to a few weeks left to live. Again—we prayed.

In the days that followed, we witnessed something amazing; something beautiful.

When compassion moves in . . . despair moves out. When hope moves in . . . fear moves out. When light moves in . . . darkness moves out.

“Jesus spoke to the people once more and said, ‘I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won’t have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life.’” (John 8:12, emphasis added, NLT).

What once appeared to be humanly unfathomable, unstoppable, un-survivable—a prison of certain death—Jesus Christ’s love entered into the darkness—paid the ransom—and opened all the doors to redemption, healing and freedom within His presence.

In the months that ensued, two dying horses were loved back to life. Today, they each stand as a four-legged living witness to what the love of JESUS can do for *any* heart that chooses to **follow Him**.

During this Christmas season, the tiny colt and the spotted mare reflect a beautiful picture of what Jesus offers to *all* mankind . . . loving REDEMPTION.

Jesus saw us—each of us—in our unfathomable, unstoppable, un-survivable prison of certain death. Because of His immeasurable compassion, He came to this earth—for you—for me—and He paid the ransom in FULL with His life . . . in exchange for our freedom.

But, we each must choose.

Will we leave the prison of our past pain and **follow Him**?

When offered this same choice, the horses didn’t look back. When they saw the gate swing open, they didn’t fight to stay in their place of death. They appeared to understand that genuine rescue was being offered to them. With eyes forward, they chose to follow the one leading them out of captivity . . . and then they summoned all their remaining strength and JUMPED into the new life that awaited.

Today, perhaps you are the one held within an inescapable place of pain. Perhaps you are the one who is trapped in an unfathomable, unstoppable, un-survivable prison of certain death?

Beloved . . . know this . . . it is JESUS who has paid the ransom for your redemption. It is JESUS who has

opened the cell door of your inescapable prison. It is JESUS who beckons you to trust Him. And, it is JESUS who is asking you to walk out of your bondage and **follow Him**.

This is the foundational choice of every human heart. This is the picture of Jesus coming to earth to pay in FULL the ransom for our redemption—so we could live in the freedom of His redeeming love.

“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45, NLT).

This is the message of Christmas itself.

“I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth. There is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus. He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone.” (1 Tim. 2:1-6a, emphasis added, NLT)

Like our new red colt, “Ransom” and our sweet spotted mare, “Redemption,” During this Christmas season, may you also choose the freedom Jesus purchased for all man-kind.

(To see the recovery journey of our new horses, please view video of Ruins to Redemption by Sarah Robinett: <https://youtu.be/JD-ZLND6T8I>).



Photo credit: @memilygreen

THE GIVING TREE

Earlier this year, the Lord showed me something beautiful, something amazing, something humbling.

A decade ago, when the Ranch was gifted more property, one of the things God spoke was to plant fruit-bearing trees—*immediately*. With the help of many strong hands and even stronger hearts, apples, pears, peaches, plums, cherries and even fig trees found a new home at Crystal Peaks. By asking God to show us HIS microclimates on each Ranch property, our fruit tree count has grown to almost 300 total.

In the years that followed, nearly every destructive force of nature attacked. Each season we lost trees due to deer, sheep, gophers, voles, mice, porcupines, squirrels, birds, fire blight, destroying wind, epic snow accumulation and drought.

Perhaps even more devastating was the criticism that seemed to fall each year like poison rain. For a full decade, I heard on repeat, “Why are you doing this? Don’t you know it’s impossible?” Or, “Why are you are directing valuable resources to something that will not work?” Or, “Why are you wasting time and energy on something that will never be productive?”

Why indeed. Within my heart, I always circled back to the same place. Ten years ago, I asked God what HE wanted for the new property. His noticeably instant answer was to plant food-bearing trees to feed His people. And whether I would live to see it produce or not was irrelevant—because HE told me to do it—anything less would be disobedience.

Often, what God asks us to do . . . in the moment . . . doesn’t make sense, especially to those in our midst. Gratefully, He doesn’t require that we understand His every request—only that we trust Him enough to *do* what He asks.

With a fatherly smile, my Heavenly Dad also reminded me that building a rescue ranch for horses, children and families 28 years ago—in a ROCK PIT—didn’t make much sense either. My job was to simply trust Him—take the next step—and steady on.

And so, team by team, we cared for the trees. Season by season, we laid hands on each one and prayed that Jesus would bless and protect them as they grew. In the doing, every tree became a friend, a fellow soldier whom we partnered with to serve the King and His people.

This year was the Ranch orchard’s tenth season. And this year, God did something only HE can. We had an unusually long, cold spring and the fruit trees were held fast within its freezing grasp. Finally, when the warmth came, it was consistent. The trees woke up, blossomed, set fruit and pressed in to produce—a *ridiculous* abundance.

The fig trees ripened first, producing the largest, most sumptuous, warm, spiced-brown-sugar flavored figs on the planet. The peaches ripened next, in *wheel barrow loads*

Photo credit: Kim Meeder

Then came the apples, buckets and buckets of every size, shape and color imaginable. And the grand finale came in the form of pears. One variety grew so large that each pear was nearly half the size of my head! I didn’t know that such glory could literally grow on trees. I marveled at how nearly every tree produced its own type of goodness.

Yet, within this incredible harvest season, there was one special tree that Jesus wanted me to experience . . . to really *see*.

The tree was a small Red Bartlett Pear. I planted it, along with a dozen other fruit trees, on the steep hillside in front of our home six years ago. It also had suffered through much challenge in its journey of maturing toward fruition.

While reading my Bible one morning, I looked up and could see through the large windows of our home that several red pears had fallen to the ground. Not wanting even one to be wasted, I gathered my old, enameled harvesting kettles and headed down to investigate.

The tree was still very small, so much so that I could easily span its breadth with my open arms. And its height did not yet reach my own. Yet, there on the deep shavings beneath the tree, lay more than 30 dark red pears. The tiny tree was telling me that today was the day for its heavily laden branches to be released from their labor.

I knelt beneath the tree and picked—and picked—and picked. With the release of each pear, I could sense something extraordinary, something beautiful, something that resembled deep satisfaction fill my hands.

By Kim Meeder

Then, the voice of my Savior started to stream into my heart. He spoke of how He commanded the tiny tree to make provision . . . *for me*. Through a difficult season, the tree never wavered. Even when its own limbs were breaking under the load, it stayed the course for which it was made. The little pear tree endured every hardship of the season and pushed through every challenge to obey its Creator and *give*.

In the moment that followed, Jesus drew a straight line up the tree, following its trunk to every branch that held every piece of fruit. Then, He said, “So it is with My people. I am the trunk and those who are firmly clinging to Me—in My timing—will bear much fruit. Then, I tell them when the fruit is ready and who it is meant to support and strengthen. Beloved, do you understand that this blessed little tree is a living picture of everyone who has ever given the Ranch ministry a gift? Do you see how each heart heard and obeyed My command? And these same souls labored, sometimes until their own limbs fractured—to entrust their gifts to *you*—to be used for *My* glory.”

There, while kneeling beneath a small tree between two overflowing kettles of pears, intense gratitude welled up and poured out in an overflow of tears.

“When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father. I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father’s commandments and remain in his love. I have told you these things so that you will be filled with joy. Yes, your joy will overflow!” (John 15:8-11, NLT)

It’s true, we serve the God of “loaves and fishes.” For those who have shouldered with us, in your season and in your way, what you might think is small or insignificant, has grown within this ministry into a MIGHTY blessing.

And for those who still might not believe that your gift has impact . . . the tiny tree that didn’t even reach the span of my arms . . . bore **157 delicious** red pears!

ONE—SINGLE—TINY tree gave a seemingly IMPOSSIBLE gift.

My dear family, as you read this, it is my prayer that you will see *yourself* reflected within this little tree. The foundation of Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch is that every man, woman and child will experience the redeeming love of Jesus Christ through this ministry. For everyone this season who has prayed for us—or shouldered with us in the physical work or has given financial support—you are just like this giving tree.

With tears of gratitude, the entire community of Crystal Peaks wishes to say,

“THANK YOU for loving us so well with your very lives.”

In part, we’re able to continue serving Him because of your strong, loyal and loving support.

Indeed, may your JOY OVERFLOW this season as you continue to love and follow Jesus.

MERRY CHRISTMAS to you our Beloved Ranch Family. May your life be blessed this New Year with a *ridiculous abundance* of HIS fruit through you and for you.

Kim and Troy

Photo credit: @imemilygreen

Photo credit: Kim Meeder

Yes! I would like to shoulder with Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch to support children, horses and families in need.

Please use my donation for:

- ☐ Where it is needed most
- ☐ Rescue the Equine
- ☐ Mentor the Child
- ☐ Hope for the Family
- ☐ Empower the Ministry
- ☐ Refuge

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Send donations to: Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch, 19344 Innes Market Road, Bend OR 97703.

You can also make your donation at **www.crystalpeaksyouthranch.org** with your credit card or PayPal account.

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ABBA'S LOVE

BY STEPHANIE VOTH

As the Director of Operations at Crystal Peaks, a large part of my role is to oversee our "Mentor the Child" pillar. This privilege often comes with the opportunity to connect with a multitude of families and hear how their children are being impacted by the Lord as they work with our session instructors.

Here at the Ranch, we're passionate about having every session be centered on the one, true source of hope and healing—Jesus Christ.

Recently, our team received the following letter from a session family that encouraged us to continue keeping Jesus as the focus of everything we do here.

As faithful supporters of this ministry, I hope this message blesses you as much as it has blessed our team.

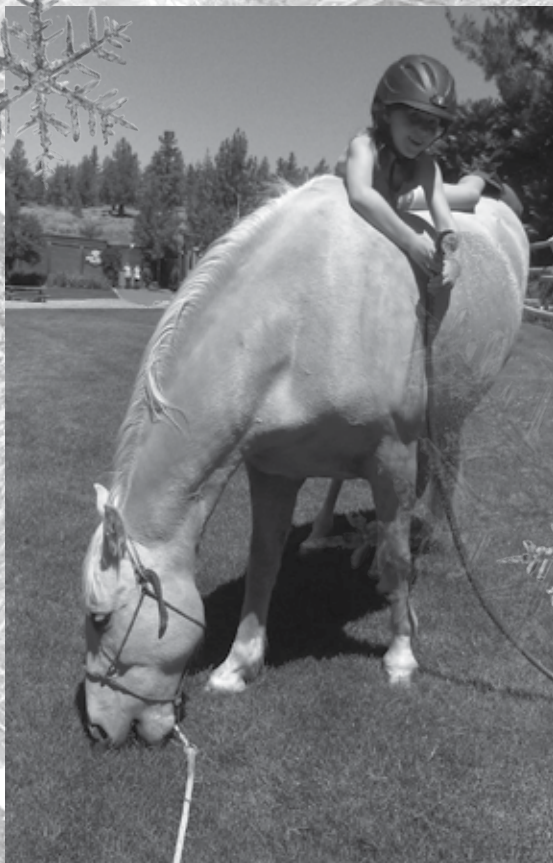


Photo credit: Sarah Robinett

All stories written in "Around the Fire" newsletter are true. Some of the names have been changed to protect individual privacy. "Around the Fire" newsletter stands on the Word of God. Multiple translations of the Holy Bible are used to assure clarity for our readership. Each author is afforded the right to choose the translation that best suits their submission.

"Hi,
I just wanted to say thank you for giving Emma and our family such an incredible time at the Ranch this year.

In April, Emma was transported to the ICU Burn unit for 2nd and 3rd degree burns around her entire torso and abdomen. The burns stretched from her chest to her tailbone and wrapped 360 degrees around her body.

We were in horror and agony watching her endure the pain. Even as the burns were happening—she was calling on the name of Jesus to help her. Even in her panic, she was the one reminding us of the words to speak when your heart and mind are paralyzed with fear.

It was a very intense month of recovery. Now, I shake my head at how quickly she (and her skin) healed! Despite our skin seeming so delicate and vulnerable, God has certainly made it to be a resilient armor unlike any other. Emma told SO many people in the hospital about her God-given horse, Silas. All she wanted was to be able to get back to him.

There have been many years now where God has used Silas to reach into her heart and settle the noise of some very difficult realities at home, and this day was no different. Perhaps a different set of difficulties, but the same steady, loving reminders through a very attentive and unshakable horse—that God is also not shaken. And even when everything seems upside down and backward, and you can't see where you're going or you're too tired to keep walking forward—*He's not.*

Watching Emma lay backward and face down on the back of that faithful horse, like the back of her faithful Father—*just resting*—was such powerful medicine for us all. On the way home that day, we talked about how Silas was God's reminder of how we are on His lead and how He will faithfully carry the whole weight of your burden and pain . . . even when we can't face forward.

Thank you, Lorissa, and thank you to others at the Ranch for reaching inside the daily, the easy and the hard, of Emma's life. I cry even now as I write this, knowing that Emma will have the memories of friends like you and horses like Silas—to be an example—of her Abba's love.

May God bless all of you in abundance.

Jesus, we are in awe of You. Thank You for this family. Thank You for healing Emma quickly. Thank You for doing it in a way that brought about a deeper relationship with You. May Emma continue to grow as a warrior for Your Kingdom. May she know how delighted You are with her. I pray Zephaniah 3:17 over her heart and over ALL who are reading this today, "*The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love . . .*" (ESV)

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!



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THE 2024 CALENDERS ARE HERE!



Photo credit: @emilygreen

Dear Extended Crystal Peaks Family,

It is our joy to share the heart of what Jesus is doing—daily—here on the Ranch. One simple way of accomplishing this is through our annual calendar. It captures poignant moments within the lives of our kids, volunteers and staff.

As our gift to you, we would like to offer each household one free calendar. We pray the Lord will bless and encourage all who see it.

To order a calendar, please go to our website at: www.crystalpeaksyouthranch.org and click “Ranch Life,” on our home page.

Or, mail your request to:
Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch
19344 Innes Market Road, Bend, Oregon 97703.

If you wish, additional calendars can also be ordered for \$12.00 each. To aid in the cost of shipping, we will mail all international orders outside the US/Canada for an \$8.00 postage fee.

Thank you Dear Family for shouldering with us in this ministry of hope.