



# AROUND the FIRE

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

## The Full Circle of His Miraculous Plan

BY KIM MEEDER

One of the greatest attributes of God is that He is Omniscient . . . He *always* has a plan.

We also know that His plan is good, because HE is good. (Jeremiah 29:11, Mark 10:18). I'm learning that when we step off the bedrock of this truth, that's when we flounder in the deep waters of uncertainty, fear, panic, fatigue, shaken faith, and the ultimate loss of hope.

Hope fades when faith breaks. Our faith breaks when His plan doesn't fit into *our* time frame.

But, when we stay the course—HIS COURSE—we'll follow in the footsteps of the saints who've gone before us in Hebrews 11. No matter what their circumstances, they *never* lost hope. They *never* lost sight of the end game of HIS perfect plan. They knew that it was coming . . . and it's *still* coming . . .

In the early days of Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch, we started our program with four horses. Each horse had a unique tale of tragedy and triumph. One was starved, another was battered. One was highly anxious and the last was physically broken. From the world's point of view, none of them were valued. They were the throw-offs, the castaways, the rejects.

One of these discarded horses was a large black Hanoverian mare who came with the name of City Blue. 'CB' was born as a very expensive show horse. As an infant, she was kicked in the shoulder with such force that the joint was destroyed. In an effort to save her, she was taken to a local university where an experimental surgery replaced her damaged joint. Miraculously, she grew up and went on to show in high levels of dressage.

Unfortunately, the show world was more than her altered body could manage and she began to limp from pain that radiated from her damaged

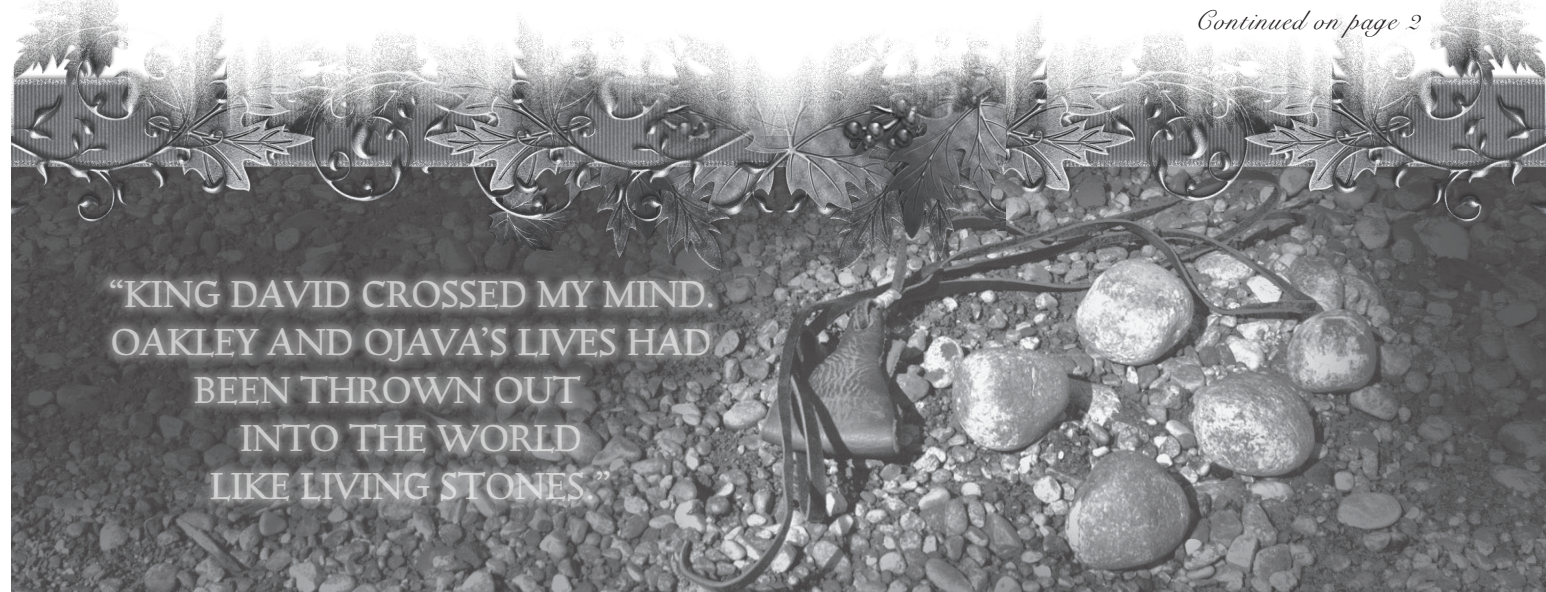
shoulder. Once she started to limp, her viability in the realm of the elite evaporated. She was then passed from home to home as a useless horse.

This 'useless' mare was donated to Crystal Peaks. She was given to the Ranch with a single purpose in mind. Although she could no longer carry a rider, she could be bred and her foals could be sold to help fund the burgeoning ministry.

And this is exactly what CB did for Crystal Peaks.

During a season when the Ranch ministry didn't have two nickels to rub together, CB provided a foal every other year. These precious babies were sold for 15,000 dollars each, enough to help drive Crystal Peaks forward into ignition. In all, she gave the Ranch five beautiful black babies, three geldings and two fillies. The last of which was kept to live on the Ranch as a covenant of CB's enduring presence and gift. Her last foal was a filly—Eclipse—Troy's personal horse to this day.

*Continued on page 2*



"KING DAVID CROSSED MY MIND.  
OAKLEY AND OJAVA'S LIVES HAD  
BEEN THROWN OUT  
INTO THE WORLD  
LIKE LIVING STONES."





Throughout the years, we would occasionally hear about the other babies. All four had entered the exclusive world of dressage. One was competing as an event horse in dressage, show jumping and cross country. Another had achieved such prowess that they were heading to the Equine U.S. Olympic Trials. Even though we cherished the updates and knew each of the four adult horses had loving homes . . . each contact left a 'pang' . . . a 'knowing' that we'd exchanged their lives for the continuation of life at Crystal Peaks. These four horses literally 'bought with their bodies' the ability for the young ministry to go forward.

That exchange has never been far from my heart.

No matter how horses come into our care, we take that responsibility with maximum seriousness. Their wellbeing, their livelihood, their ability to thrive in this world is literally in our hands. It's a mighty obligation that we take with utmost importance. Their future lies within our trustworthiness to make the right decision for each individual.

With their pictures sprinkled throughout our history, they've remained deep in our hearts. They're living stones in our foundation . . . stones that are still far from home.

Fifteen years after watching the first beautiful, black gelding leave the Ranch, a recent and unexpected call came through the main office. The message was exclusively for Troy and I. The woman on the line was elderly and kind. She identified herself as the individual who'd purchased CB's

first two babies—a gelding and a filly. We knew them as 'Oakley' and 'Ojava,' each bearing names reflecting the first letter of their sire's name, a massive black Hanoverian named 'Ostwind.'



Our aged friend relayed how her life had been rocked by the loss of her husband and home. She was no longer able to care for the black brother and sister who'd been in her keep for over a decade. Deeply saddened to let them go, she remembered something we'd said fifteen years earlier. These horses were so important to us that we actually wrote into our sales agreement that if she was ever faced with getting rid of the horses . . . *we wanted them back.*

In a soft voice, diminished by age and circumstance, the offer came, "If you have room to take them . . . I will GIVE them back to you."

And just like that, the full circle of God's perfect plan came roaring back with all the subtlety of two huge black boomerangs.

Two of our kids were returning to the Ranch of their birth. We didn't really know much about them other than Oakley was now 15 and Ojava was 13. We were briefed that they each had sustained some trauma from their years of elite competition. As if returning to their homeland from the battle front, each would be arriving with their own unique 'wounds of war.'

To me, it didn't matter if they only had three legs . . . I just wanted them HOME!

The night of their arrival was July 20<sup>th</sup>. While waiting by the darkened road with cones and lights, it wasn't lost on my heart that the number '20' is the Biblical symbol for REDEMPTION. Our two kiddos were being redeemed, brought back into the family of their birth. As I stood waiting in the darkness,

I could literally feel what seemed like curving arcs of light race toward each other. A great circle, one that had spanned 15 years, was being completed in this moment. God's timing is perfect.

These two horses gave their lives for the Ranch ministry . . . now their lives would be cared for by the same ministry they'd helped to forge long ago.

King David crossed my mind. Oakley and Ojava's lives had been thrown out into the world like living stones. And because it was God who'd thrown them, the giants of financial impossibilities were slaughtered by their arrival. Now, they had done their job.





Their portion of the battle was over. The enemy was defeated. The great purpose of God won.

It wasn't until 10:30 pm that the small welcoming team from the Ranch and I heard the roar of the semi-tractor-trailer rig downshifting for the final turn before Crystal Peaks. They were here. The living stones were finally home.

The last time I saw them, they were infants, less than a year old. I'd never seen the full-grown horses that now waited behind the transport door. Once the heavy door was pushed back, I couldn't wait for the ramp to be positioned. I clamored up the four-foot drop, not wanting another second to pass before embracing their beautiful black faces.

The narrow pinstripe of a blaze on the babies I'd once known, had now spread into lovely stripes of white down each of their mature faces. Ojava had grown into a slender, athletic mare of 16 hands. Oakley now stood at a stately 17 hands. Ojava was first to unload off the transport. As I led her onto the driveway, I was aware that she held her head high, moving it from side to side, smelling the cool high desert night. I couldn't help but wonder if she remembered, if there was something rising from the depths of her foal's heart that told her she was home.

After settling the siblings in for the night, I just stood in the corral watching them move through the darkness. Then, it occurred to me—after the better part of two decades—the full circle of His miraculous plan was complete.

In pondering this event, some beautiful truths have emerged.

Indeed, God always has a plan—and it's good—because HE is good. Yet, in our humanity, sometimes His goodness feels short-circuited by our short-sightedness. Sometimes, the part of His plan that I currently experience is so narrow that it feels anything *but* good.

In these moments, it's easy to choose falling backward into the 'why God?' syndrome. It's the place where we base all of our emotion on a singular event, season or section of trail, instead of trusting Him for the *entire* journey.

But—we can also choose to fall *forward*—forward into *faith in HIM*.

It's the place where our faith declares, "I don't know the way . . . *but I know YOU* . . . and *YOU* know the way. As a matter of fact, *You ARE the way*. So, I choose to follow You through this hard place because I know that You ARE leading me somewhere good. You ARE leading me in a full circle. You ARE leading me deeper into Your Presence. You ARE leading me HOME."

Psalms 23:4 (NLT) tells us, "*Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for You are close beside me. Your rod and Your staff protect and comfort me.*"



Friends, we're commanded to *STAY THE COURSE* and *WALK THROUGH* the dark valleys—not camp out and live in them. This truth remains—God IS good—and His plan IS good.

*"I have told you all this so that you may have peace in Me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."* John 16:33 (NLT).

Within our lives, no trauma, heartache or hardship can change this fact—JESUS has already overcome ALL OF IT! Our current negative situations cannot bend, mar, crack or break the ultimate GOODNESS of HIS plan for each of us.

If I will just commit to *stay the course*—HIS course—I too, will experience the glorious completeness—the full circle of HIS miraculous plan.



# The Sword of the

# SPIRIT

By Brad Shultz

A few days ago, I stood side by side with a boy named Joey in the wood shop. At the beginning of the session he had walked up the hill with a partially finished wooden sword in hand. He began building it in his last session and today he wanted to finish it.

We make a wide variety of items in the wood shop, but when session kids come up with their own project idea, the most common item is a sword. I'd like to tell you that I don't understand the fascination with weapons but that wouldn't be true. When I was a child, every stick was a sword, gun, or even better, a bazooka. It seems there's an idea, deeply ingrained in us from the earliest age that we were made to take part in some great battle or adventure. I think that's why most boys make swords.

One of my key jobs in these 'sword-smithing' sessions is to redirect the focus from physical warfare (and chasing younger siblings with a wooden sword) towards the spiritual reality behind why we're drawn to battle at all. This often leads to a discussion of the Armor of God, relayed to us in the *Bible*.

You know the passage: belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, shoes of the readiness of the Gospel of peace, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, Ephesians 6:14-17 (ESV).

This passage takes our focus off the worldly battle and puts it on the spiritual. After all, "*... we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present*

*darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*" (Verse 12).

To Paul, the warfare implements of his day were a physical representation of a spiritual reality. Reading his words, the sword we're making is no longer just a toy. It's a reminder that we must "*In all circumstances take up . . . the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.*" (Verse 16-17).

As Joey and I were making the sword, I began to explain that Paul tells us to put on the Armor of God because we have an enemy. When? We need to put on the armor every day. Why? Putting it on helps us stand firm against the schemes of the devil and resist him in the time of evil. It was at that point I felt compelled to go off script as we fashioned the blade.

I saw an inverse in the analogy. The sword itself was a great reminder of the Word of God, but fashioning a sword was just the opposite of a spiritual reality. I looked at Joey and asked him, "If our sword is an analogy of the Word of God, do we sharpen the Word the way we're sharpening this sword?" To further clarify the meaning of my question, I asked, "Do we shape the Word the way we are fashioning the handle of this sword to fit our hand?"

Joey thought for a second about the question before replying, "No...I don't think so." He seemed a little hesitant because he appeared to not fully understand what I was getting at. Yet, at the same time, he was fairly certain that we don't sharpen God's Word and that we don't fit it to our hand.

I told him that he was correct.

God's Word is already sharper than any two-edged sword and it's perfectly fitted by the One who gave it. It's so well fitted, that its 'fitting' was solidified in a curse to any who would add or take away from it. Pressing in I continued, "If we don't change it, do you think we grow in our ability to use it?"

Joey almost immediately told me, "We do grow in our ability to use it."

"How?" I asked. He replied, "By reading it."

"Yes...we grow by reading it," I affirmed. "So, it's not we that shape the Sword. It's the Sword that shapes us through the power of the Holy Spirit." I continued, "The Sword is already perfect, sharp, and ready for battle. Yet, even in its completeness, to some it's a stumbling block and to others it's foolishness. If the Sword of the Spirit is the weapon God has given us against the evil one, why doesn't everyone see it as true, sharp and fitted?"

"Because they don't believe?" Joey questioned.

"Exactly," I replied. "In 2 Corinthians, Paul tells us that we've been blinded by satan from seeing the glory of Christ in the Gospel. God gives us 'the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' The glory of God is in the Gospel, in the person and work of Jesus Christ, yet unbelievers are blind to see it."

I went on to explain that people may look at the Gospel

but completely miss the beauty of it because they don't see the glory of God in Christ. They see Jesus as a good teacher or a great model for their lives but they don't see the magnificence of God in Him or worship Him as Lord.

However, when the Gospel is unveiled and we see it for what it is, we truly see Jesus' glory—"glory as of the only Son from the Father."

The sight of God's grace in the Gospel changes us as we realize that we are loved and accepted by God even though we don't deserve it.

We see unmistakable glory in Jesus as strength in meekness and love in justice. We pick up the Sword that was previously unlovely and we behold the beauty of God who made it because He has revealed Himself in it. We feel the handle and discover that it fits as though it was made for our hand, not because it has changed—but because we have been changed by it—through the power of the Spirit—the one and only living God.

So, now I ask you: Have *you* been shaped by the power of the Holy Spirit in the Word of God?

Have you beheld the glory of God in Jesus Christ? Can you, with the Psalmist of Psalm 119 say to our gracious Father, "I DELIGHT in Your statutes" (verse 16) without hesitation?

If you haven't had that experience, I'd like to encourage you today to ask God to show you His glory in all of scripture. Then open His Word and begin to read with an understanding that the details He reveals are a window through which we may behold His glory. It can be easy to read through the Bible and see only the human perspective and miss the larger picture of the glory of God in the Gospel. It's woven throughout—from Genesis to Revelation. As you read, look for the Gospel story and you'll begin to see that God is constantly revealing Himself on every page.

He knows you and loves you. Today, He wants—*you*—to know Him.

*"Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Your law."*  
Psalm 119:18 (ESV)

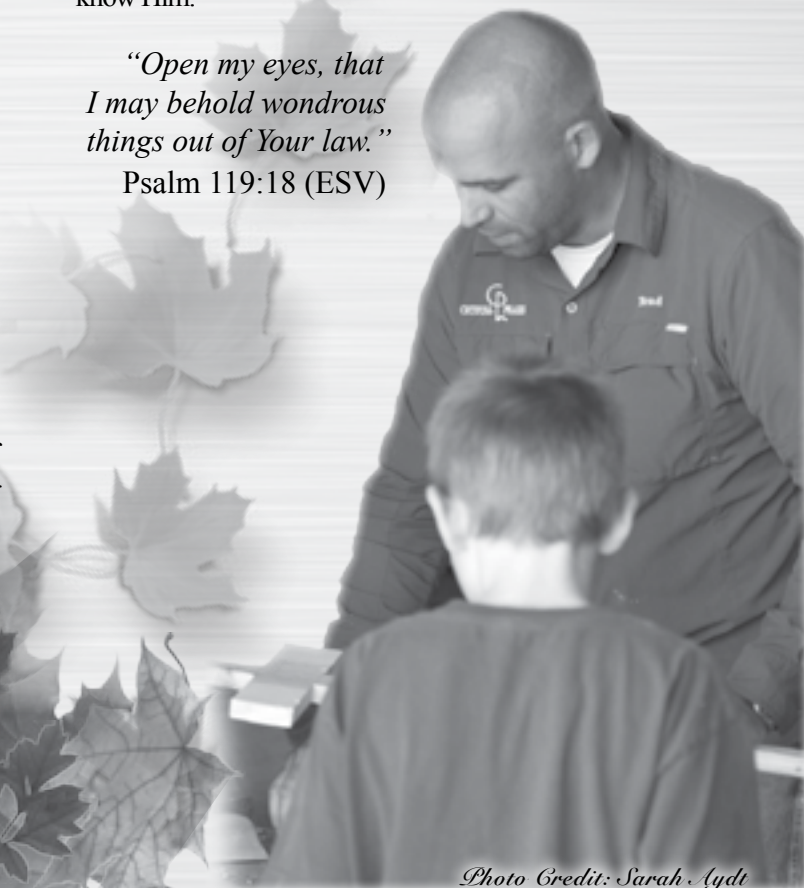


Photo Credit: Sarah Aydt





# DEEPER RESTORATION

BY RACHEL SHULTZ

God is faithful to call . . .  
and faithful to equip those with a  
heart for families and children.

He restores the brokenness  
of life by His Spirit. Since  
Crystal Peaks began hosting  
introductory Information Clinics  
in 2005, the Lord has multiplied  
and empowered hundreds of  
similar ministries for His works  
of intervention, mentorship and  
discipleship. To date, Crystal  
Peaks has helped shoulder into  
existence over 200 independent  
organizations who are now  
actively serving families in their  
own communities. These new  
ministries consistently invest  
in others from the overflow of  
love and hope through Jesus  
Christ. These similar ministries  
advocate for the weary, hope-  
hindered, traumatized, and  
discouraged in their midst.

To empower those who've  
attended the Clinic and moved  
forward into the work of  
ministry, we began hosting an  
annual 'DEEPER, Jesus First,'  
Ministry Conference in 2012.  
Through this gathering, we  
encourage, collaborate, refuel,  
and shoulder together to nurture  
one another in the work the Lord  
calls us to walk out.

Each of our conferences has  
a time set aside for our guests to  
meet our staff. This gives them  
a chance to connect with the  
names, faces, hearts, gifting, and  
roles of the team the Lord has  
built at Crystal Peaks. Our heart  
is to share with these fellow  
ministers the truths that the Lord  
is currently teaching us.

This year Katie Jacobsen, our  
Public Relations Director, openly  
revealed a vulnerable word of  
encouragement, to be at peace  
with the tilling of our hearts.

I pray it will encourage your  
heart as well.

Our God is an initiator; He won't leave any place untouched within you.

He will keep knocking. He will keep beckoning. He will keep whispering your  
name until He has captured your whole heart. Back in January, He called me to  
go deeper with these words, "Katie, there's this door we need to open—this pit  
we need to step into. It's going to be painful, but I promise, in My time, that pit  
will become a well of My living water. It will hurt enough to feel like an end—but  
beloved—it's actually a beginning. I make all things beautiful in My time. Let Me  
make this place in your heart new. Will you trust Me?"

He said it with such intention. Words like these invite us to allow Jesus to  
willingly turn our world upside down as He says, "Let Me empty you of this  
place, so I can fill you back up with My Life."

The results attract us, the places we want to get to. It's the process—the  
upheaval—that challenge us. Upheaval is something that comes from deep  
within. It has less to do with our circumstances and more to do with the state of  
our heart. It can be described as a disruption, a disturbance. It causes disorder  
and agitation. It's difficult to embrace and easy to run from. But, upheaval is  
something Jesus asks us to endure, something He desires that we'll trust Him  
with. He appeals to our heart because He knows the thing we won't deal with—  
is the same thing—that steals our freedom.

And He paid such a great price for us to be free.

We can decide to build our life on God's goodness, to hold fast to the truth  
that He is a good, good Father. I've come to believe that when God asks us  
to allow Him to break something open inside, it's always so that He can plant  
something. He uproots places of pain, fear, anger, self-protection, etc., so that  
He can plant life.

If you've been feeling that disorder, that agitation, it's not to shame you . . .  
it's to heal you.

The upheaval is not to break you down; it's to break you open.

It's His persistent loving intention for you that moves Him to keep knocking  
on that specific door of your heart. The question is . . . will you let His light shine  
into that place?

He beckons us to be people who are brave with our lives. We must realize  
that in pursuing His bravery, 'convenient' isn't really a word that's going to get  
us where we want to go. Convenience rarely leads to faith.

Let us not be like Moses' generation who—despite God's continuous  
provision—looked at their surroundings and said, "If only we had died in Egypt  
or even here in the wilderness. Why is the Lord taking us to this country only to  
have us die in battle? Wouldn't it be better for us to return to Egypt?" Instead,  
let's be like Joshua and Caleb's generation who saw giants in the land and still—  
with courage—chose to stand and say 'YES' to everything God asked.

My challenge for you is this: take time to listen . . . invite Jesus to speak.

Where in your life has Jesus been asking you to go deeper still? Are there  
places you've not let Him touch? In His relationship with you, where is He saying,  
"If you'll allow an upheaval, if you'll endure it for My sake, I will come into that  
place—in My time—and I will deal bountifully with that part of your life."

Allow Him to uproot, so He can plant life in you, in your relationships, in your  
ministry.

Isaiah 58:11-12 (NLV) says, *"The Lord will always lead you. He will meet the  
needs of your soul in the dry times and will give strength to your body. You will  
be like a garden that has enough water, like a well of water that never dries up.  
And your cities which were destroyed long ago will be built again. You will set  
up the stones of the bases of the old buildings. You will be called the one who  
builds again the broken walls, and who makes the streets on which people live  
like new."*

Trust your life to His goodness and stand with courage. For we serve a God  
who doesn't lead us where HE doesn't go. And rest assured, giants only dwell  
where destiny is promised.

Written by Katie Jacobsen



In each of our days, especially in ministry, there are times when our soul becomes weary. The hope of the Lord can be quenched if we're unwilling to allow our whole heart to be uncovered, opened wide to His restorative work of life. *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."* John 12:24 (ESV).

God is present as we invite His continuing cultivation within our hearts. When we allow Him to lead us into deeper restoration, we ourselves become more empowered to humbly bear more fruit and to lead others into His life-giving Presence.

To find out more about our Similar Ministry support services please consider attending or referring someone to our annual Information Clinic.

**<https://www.crystalpeaksyouthranch.org/what-we-do/similar-ministries-development/information-clinic/>**

To find an active Similar Ministry please visit our website often. The Lord continues to open new organizations globally. Please pray that He would further His Kingdom through the planting of new ministries within reach of families in need.

**<https://www.crystalpeaksyouthranch.org/what-we-do/similar-ministries-development/similar-ministries-finder/>**



*Photo Credit: Sarah Aydt*

*"Katie and Rachel"*

*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
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- ☐ Hope for the Family
- ☐ Empower the Ministry

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*We have an  
exciting announcement!*



Focus on the Family has selected Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch to be their featured organization for the Odyssey Adventure Club (OAC) during the month of September. The purpose behind the OAC is to introduce parents and their children to other like-minded Christian organizations and the impact they're making through high quality audio dramas. The 30-minute audio episodes combine the faith lessons parents appreciate with characters and stories that kids love.

We're thrilled to be featured in an episode that will be heard by over 19,000 families who are a part of the OAC. Each Odyssey episode comes with a special video documentary and a set of activities, called Web Quests. The episode, documentary and activities will relate to or feature Crystal Peaks in some creative way.

The episode will be available online beginning September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017. The club offers a free 14-day trial (no credit card needed) for families who aren't members of the club and wish to listen in. You can sign up for the free trial and hear the featured CPYR episode titled, "Angels in Horsehair", by going to:

[https://www.oaclub.org/club#age\\_check\\_free\\_trial?refcd=379301](https://www.oaclub.org/club#age_check_free_trial?refcd=379301)

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. All 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.