



RESCUE THE EQUINE

AROUND the FIRE

Summer 2017

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

LETTING GO

BY JEFF WOODFORD

“...lean not on your own understanding.”

Are you the type of person who feels the need to be in control?

Does the path of your day follow a regimented routine; a safe place of comfort where you find familiar normalcy? These attributes describe me well. Some time ago, God presented me with a very special experience that has influenced the way I think. He clearly showed me how clamoring for control can quickly turn into sin.

Crystal Peaks owns a horse named Tomahawk. He’s the type of horse that people notice—both by his outgoing personality and his uncommon brown and white leopard spotted coat. He’s a horse that I’ve not spent much time with until now. In an effort to get to know Tomahawk better, I led him out of the paddock and up to the hitching post to groom and saddle him. As I brushed his thick winter coat, the proverbial ‘stage’ was being set for the day’s ride. Tomahawk was fidgety, alert and ready to expend some energy working.

The sun was beginning to warm the crisp winter morning air as I zipped up my coat. I buckled the strap on my helmet and swung up into my saddle.

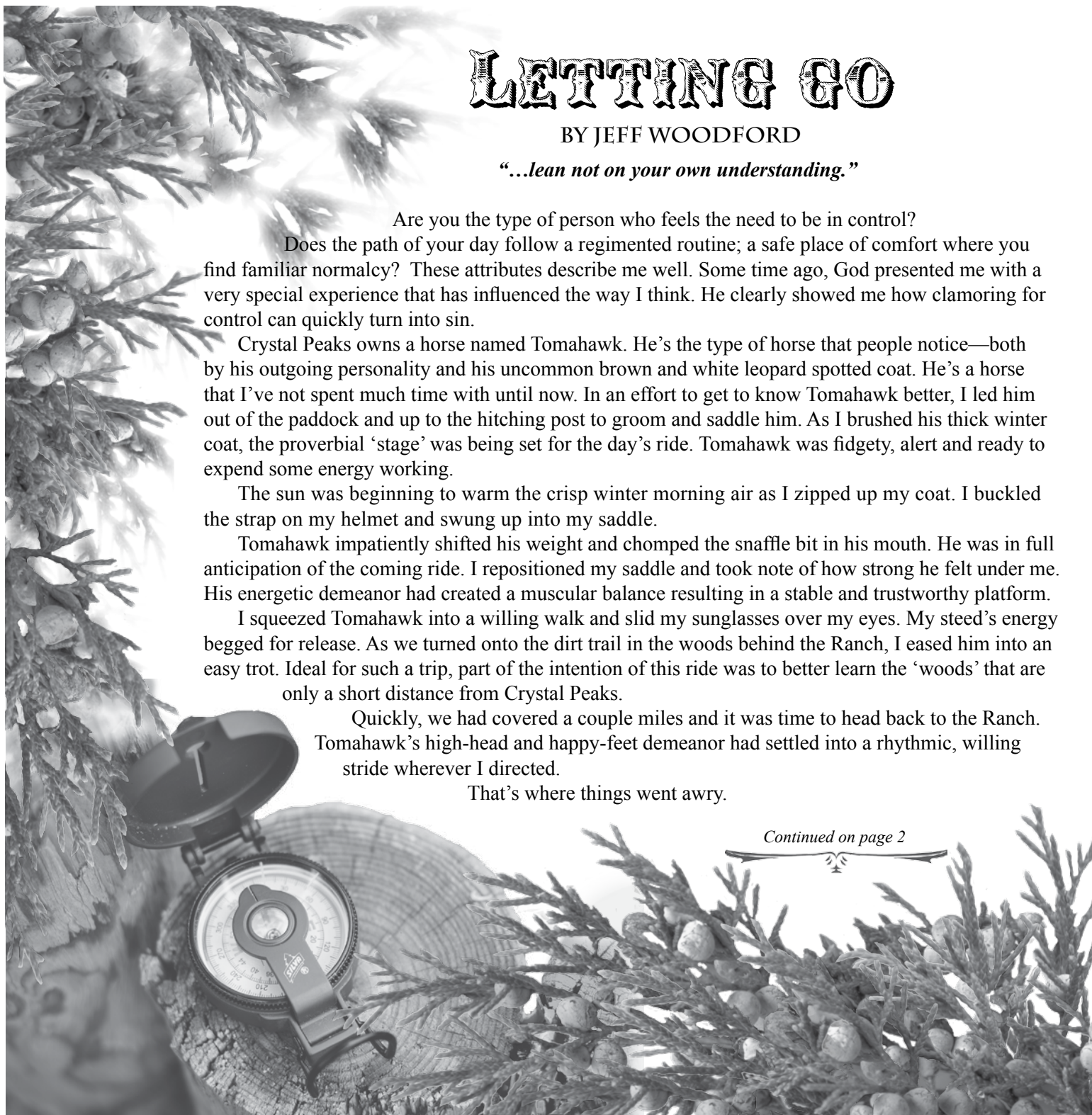
Tomahawk impatiently shifted his weight and chomped the snaffle bit in his mouth. He was in full anticipation of the coming ride. I repositioned my saddle and took note of how strong he felt under me. His energetic demeanor had created a muscular balance resulting in a stable and trustworthy platform.

I squeezed Tomahawk into a willing walk and slid my sunglasses over my eyes. My steed’s energy begged for release. As we turned onto the dirt trail in the woods behind the Ranch, I eased him into an easy trot. Ideal for such a trip, part of the intention of this ride was to better learn the ‘woods’ that are only a short distance from Crystal Peaks.

Quickly, we had covered a couple miles and it was time to head back to the Ranch. Tomahawk’s high-head and happy-feet demeanor had settled into a rhythmic, willing stride wherever I directed.

That’s where things went awry.

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I knew that the Federal BLM land—where I was riding—was completely surrounded by roads. Technically, there was no way I could get lost, right? In perspective, there's about 20 miles between said roads. If I somehow did become terribly lost, I'd simply keep riding until I found a road. Then, I would either ride home from there or call for a pick up. With this confidence in place I turned Tomahawk off the beaten path into the trees and sage.

I took note of the sun's position. It was at my one o'clock. My sense of direction suggested this was the way to Crystal Peaks. Tomahawk and I continued on this course through rocky outcroppings, over hills and under tree branches for about an hour. My awe grew at this horse's pure strength, stamina and desire to continue despite the rough terrain under his tough, un-shod hooves.

At this point I felt we should've come across another path or dirt road. So I did what no logical person would do: I changed my course. My sense of bearing, my need to be in control, that innate thing inside me determined that I'd been moving in the wrong direction and now I needed to head a different direction. Strangely, having the sun to my left, at 9 o'clock, felt right. Yes, now I would surely find my way back to the Ranch!

After another 90 minutes without any landmarks, my heart rate climbed as fear set in. I was definitely lost and had no idea which way to go to get back home.

I'd heard that a horse always knows his way home and can be trusted to go there if left to decide on his own. Desperate, I began experimenting with this 'ol' cowboy tale' by occasionally giving Tomahawk a loose rein. He'd gently veer to the left, until the sun was at my 2 o'clock position. This was further to the south than I'd been headed. "No," I thought to myself. "That can't be correct...this other way just feels right." I picked up the reins and Tomahawk willingly followed as I unknowingly led us further and further from home. I repeated this process at least four more times, achieving the same result and response.

We still hadn't crossed any road or trail. Panic was threatening to set in.

I was thankful I had my phone, but realized I couldn't get directions home if I didn't know where I was. So, calling someone was illogical. I pondered this for an embarrassingly long time before I realized that I had a smart phone . . . with GPS.

Within sixty seconds, Google Maps told me how wrong I'd been this entire time—and—how correct Tomahawk was all along. Staring down at my phone, I let Tomahawk choose our heading on a loose rein. Sure enough, his course lined up

exactly with what the all-too-familiar triangular cursor said would lead straight home.

From then on Tomahawk determined our direction of travel. I only had to lightly steer him to avoid trees and low branches. He never wavered or needed to change course—he knew exactly where we needed to be. My job was to put my cell phone away and allow him to lead me.

I heard something recently that put this experience into perspective. "The Holy Spirit is like a river. You cannot change where the river goes but you can jump in and flow with it!" That day God was showing me what He desires through my horse. He wanted me to flow with Him . . . to let go and trust Him.

Eventually, through the Juniper trees, I saw the familiar landscape of Innes Market Road. Tomahawk stepped out of the brush at exactly the crossroads we needed to find to make our final turn for home. By then my serving of 'humble pie' was nearly consumed. I was glad to be eating it as we casually trotted up to the hitching rail where the day began.

After de-tacking, I rubbed down my sweaty horse to help him dry off. Questions reverberated in my head. The Holy Spirit was

asking me, "How did that go with you clinging onto control of the situation?"

A lump rose in my throat as I realized how everything that went wrong on this ride originated with me and me alone. "Jeff, why do you do the same thing with Me?" The lump grew. "What do you think would happen . . . if you learned to 'let go' in your spiritual walk toward Me?"

Since that day I've continued to process those questions. Asking, what is the genesis of my desire to control? As I peel back the layers of my answer, it ultimately comes down to one thing: pride.

Pride calls me to rely more on my own plan than God's. Pride calls me to fear what He has for me because it's unknown. Pride calls me to forget all the times He has proven Himself to me. Thankfully, TRUTH reminds me in Proverbs to: "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.*" Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV).

My Heavenly Father taught me an incredible lesson that day, and placed a very patient horse under me to seal it. If you're like me and feel yourself grasping for control, I urge you to ask, "Why?" Acknowledge the reason and then follow HIM . . . the only One who truly knows the way home.



Photo credit: Katie Jacobsen

Fear Not

BY ANN HAWLEY

It was horse moving day at the Ranch. Each spring, just before our session season begins, the horses are led from the large pasture across the street to the two paddocks on the Main Ranch. The herd, which has lived together throughout the winter months, is separated on this day into smaller groups. With the help of our staff members and volunteers, most of the herd is led up the driveway to the Main Ranch, leaving a small remnant remaining in the pasture. This remaining group is made up of the horses that will be enjoying this season in retirement.

Horse moving day is always fraught with a certain amount of caution—we move 30 horses across a road that connects highways—this day was no exception. There's always the 'usual suspects' who we know we'll need to keep an eye on. Covenant was already pacing up and down the fence line in anticipation of the approaching group of people. Near him, Ele began pawing at the ground with trepidation.

Jeff, our Equine Manager, had planned for every eventuality: each person was assigned to a specific horse and an orderly plan was in place to assure a smooth and safe transition. All was going precisely according to plan until the last horse was led out of the pasture and the gate was closed.

The lock clicked loudly into place.

That's when the entire group saw Gideon, our small pony. He was being left behind and was wild with anxiety. He ran back and forth and called loudly to his friends. He was so upset he seemed to be thinking, "Wait! There must be some mistake!"

Gideon is possibly the most sweet-tempered

horse on the Ranch. Although he is blind in one eye and losing vision in the other one, he's a kind, patient pony who's universally loved. Gideon has been an integral part of our session program for many years, but his advanced age and deteriorating vision compelled Jeff to deem him ready for the peaceful retirement that he deserves.

But Gideon had never been separated from the main herd. So this normally patient and trusting spotted pony was thrown into a state of confusion and fear. The world he knew was being split apart.

Have you ever been clipping along in life when something just stops you in your tracks? Maybe it's a serious illness . . . a job loss . . . a shattered relationship . . . or possibly even the loss of a loved one.

Suddenly, you feel frozen and shell-shocked. A sense of grief and impending doom washes over you. Fear and anxiety come rushing to the surface.

I think if we're honest, most of us have been overcome by fear at some point in our lives. Maybe we'd be more comfortable defining our fear as "worry." But fear and worry are really two sides of the same coin. Both equally remove us from the comfort and peace that only God can provide.

At its core, fear prevents us from truly living.

Fear isolates us into our own suffering. The more we allow ourselves to wallow in fear, the more we're apt to seek *comfort* itself—over *Christ* Himself. The truth is: in Christ, we can simply refuse to be controlled by our fear. According to Oswald Chambers, "The remarkable thing about God is that when you fear God, you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God, you fear everything else."

When our focus is on Jesus, there's no room for fear.

He lifts us above our present circumstances and allows us—even briefly—to see things from His perspective. Corrie ten Boom, Holocaust survivor and author once said, "Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow. It empties today of its strength."

The fear and anxiety that Gideon was experiencing was real. Although a few horses remained behind with him, his closest friends from the herd were leaving. How can we help a horse walk through his fear? We do it by building trust. Just as the Father asks us to trust Him in ALL things, animals must learn to trust their owners. The only way to build trust is to prove ourselves trustworthy.

If we fully surrender to Jesus, He always proves Himself trustworthy EVERY—SINGLE—TIME.

"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."
Isaiah 41:10 (ESV).



Photo Credit: Katie Jacobsen

Gideon is slowly learning to be comforted by his remaining herd members. His fear and anxiety are ultimately tempered by the consistent love and attention he receives from Jeff and the rest of the staff. As Oswald Chambers reminds us, "Faith never knows where it is being led, but it loves and knows the one who is leading." Gideon truly knows Jeff. And Jeff has proven himself to be a trustworthy leader. But you and I have the ultimate trustworthy leader: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths." Proverbs 3:5-6 (ESV).

Are you experiencing a season of fear and worry? Are you holding 'tight to the reins' in an effort to control your life? The irony is that it's only when we loosen our grip and completely surrender to our Savior that we can experience true peace and comfort. Author Beth Moore says: "God surpasses our dreams when we reach past our personal plans and agenda to take the hand of Christ and walk the path He has chosen for us. He is obligated to keep us dissatisfied until we come to Him and His plan for complete satisfaction . . . God will sometimes allow things to get bad enough that we will be forced to look up. Victory always begins with a cry for help. When we come to the end of ourselves and cry out for help, amazing things happen."

I'm reminded of the thoughtful words of my beloved grandmother. She only had an eighth-grade education but was one of the wisest women I've ever known. Whenever I'd start traveling down a path fraught with worry, she would softly shake her head, hug me tightly, and in her heavily accented English say:

"Baby, worry is just borrowing trouble from the future." And you know? My grandmother was absolutely right!

All we really have is NOW. We can choose to spend the present moment in worry, anxiety, and fear. But God wants so much more for us than that! If we CHOOSE to seek Him, He promises to provide our daily needs: "Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and He will give you everything you need." Luke 12:31 (NLT).

"The presence of fear does not mean you have no faith. Fear visits everyone. But make your fear a visitor and not a resident."
-Max Lucado

It's interesting how animals can be such great teachers if we take the time to really observe and learn from them. Watching a kind, gentle pony filled with fear can remind us that we're not so very different from the rest of God's creation. But while Gideon must rely on a trusted human leader, we are blessed with our Heavenly Father who promises to never leave us or forsake us. "The LORD Himself goes before you and will be with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged." Deuteronomy 31:8 (NIV).

Sometimes, I find myself fearing fear itself. I don't WANT to be fearful because it feels faithless. It's such an easy game of manipulation for the enemy to try and gain a foothold in our lives. If fear creeps into our consciousness, we have the ability to immediately turn to Jesus. Max Lucado reminds us: "The presence of fear does not mean you have no faith. Fear visits everyone. But make your fear a visitor and not a resident."

"The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by Him we cry, 'Abba Father.' " Romans 8:15 (NIV).

Occasionally, our Father carefully allows some of our fears to come true so that we can experience the depth of His love and know WE CAN SURVIVE. The only thing that we can't survive is the loss of God's love.

Thankfully, that's nothing we EVER have to fear!



Photo Credit: Katie Jacobsen



THROUGH *the* STORM

By Troy Meeder

“God works in mysterious ways.”

With over five decades of life behind me, memories of my childhood still resonate with those words spoken by my treasured grandfather. No matter the circumstances, his warm Irish baritone voice would gently and purposefully remind us of the REST in those words. No situation, no storm, no difficulty would deter Grandpa Kelly from always returning to that simple statement of pure truth. Our God moves in ways we often cannot understand. Simple wisdom was offered from the heart of a simple man.

I confess, I deeply miss that kind, gentle, powerful man.

At 6 foot 3 inches, my Grandpa Kelly's mere presence commanded attention. He was a true patriot. Twice he left home and family to serve our nation in World War II. He enlisted as a 16 year old. After months of battle, when officers discovered he was too young, the Army sent him home. With his love for this great nation undeterred, he signed up again when he was 18 years old and returned to the battlefields of England and France.

He died when I was a boy. But his wisdom spoken over my heart did not.

Indeed, “God works in mysterious ways.”

Never was this statement so profoundly true than during the events of this past winter. As many already know, the West Ranch indoor arena collapsed Sunday, January 8th. Central Oregon was beset by an epic, record-breaking snow year. For weeks residents never saw the sun. Storm after storm roared down on the Pacific Northwest, unleashing the very best of what a Central Oregon winter can offer. We live in a desert.

Water in any form is a good thing. The weight of consecutive storms all releasing deep snow finally overwhelmed the tired old building. The destruction was complete.

After rushing down and seeing the chaos, I confess, my first response was . . . *not* positive.

As Kim and I reviewed and photographed the damage, I

felt my heart move like a roller coaster from gratitude over the fact no one was hurt, to feeling overwhelmed by all that needed to be done. My mind bounced like a pinball from question to question. “Will insurance cover this? What about our equipment? How am I going to keep the Ranch properties clear of snow without equipment? How will we even get the staff to the office? How in the world am I going to clean up all this rubble? Lord, what are You up to?”

I was left to stand in three feet of snow with the thermometer struggling to reach above zero. The snow

continued to fall all around me. I stood motionless, staring up at the mountainous pile of broken debris.

My focus rolled from gratefulness to my Savior—to eyes on myself. Only seconds before, I was so deeply thankful no one was inside the building. Almost instantly my gratitude burned up within the furnace of the unknown. My thoughts continued to spiral and twist, “What am I going to do? How am I going to fix everything? Where is Jesus in THIS?”

How quickly I'd transitioned from thankfulness to uncertainty—peace to turmoil—faith to unbelief. How short the journey was from trusting in a God who holds everything in the palm of His hand . . . to certainty that He'd forgotten me.

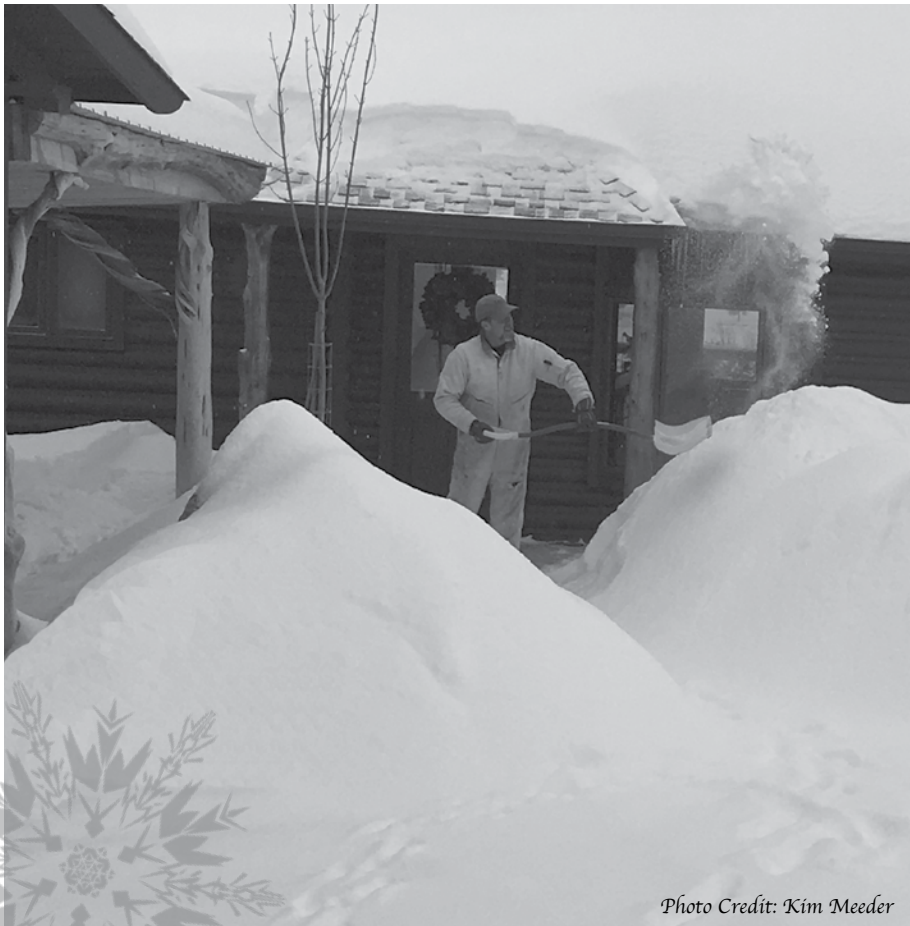


Photo Credit: Kim Meeder



Photo Credit: Kim Meeder

Did He somehow miss foreseeing our troubles? How could the Author of creation look past the fact that too much snow would crush the arena?

Standing alone in the snow, I wondered, “GOD . . . weren’t you watching?”

As if drifting down within the perfect flakes, the answer settled on my heart. “Yes . . . I was. Yes . . . I AM.”

The authority of His Word began to pour over my soul.

“He existed before anything else, and He holds all creation together. Christ is also the head of the church, which is His body. He is the beginning, supreme over all who rise from the dead. So He is first in everything.” Colossians 1:17-18 (NLT).

Jesus—the Author of all things—never loses sight of us. (John 1:1-5).

Later that morning, as Kim and I spent time in worship and adoration of the One true God, my heart finally quieted within the promise that certainly Jesus holds all things together—especially when my circumstances don’t make sense. My quick journey to frustration melted in the presence of His assurance.

“Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and He will give you everything you need.” Matthew 6:33 (NLT).

When we balance our life around the Presence of God, He takes care of everything else we will ever face. Friend, I don’t know what catastrophes you face. I’m unaware of what might be keeping you up at night. I don’t know what struggles you’re grappling with. What I do know is this . . . you can trust God to work in mysterious and wonderfully unexpected ways.

It’s true for every storm; there is a beginning and an end. God will never abandon those who call on His name. Jesus Himself said, “I will NEVER leave you nor forsake you.” (Hebrews 13:5, Deuteronomy 31:6).

It’s within the turmoil of the unknown that we—if we truly look—can see the heart of the Father. Psalms 23:4 (NLT) encourages, *“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.”* It’s not God’s intention for us to stay in the storm. We are always called to walk through the storm with Him.

Although spoken long ago, the wise words of my grandfather still comfort me when I face situations I don’t understand. God does work in mysterious ways. I’m grateful that the mysteries of God are not so mysterious after all. His Word promises peace amidst the storm—peace amidst the mysterious. *“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).

While we might not understand what God the Father is doing, we abide in His promise that He has not forgotten or abandoned us. He IS at work in ALL things.

As you reach forward into the life God has given, be assured—no matter the struggle—no matter the storm—He IS with you. While His work in and through us might seem mysterious, it is God who is moving within us.

His love is what draws us closer to His side THROUGH the storm. Indeed, He does work in mysterious ways . . . and I’m so grateful.



Photo Credit: Kim Meeder

From all of us at
Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch

Thank you for your prayers and giving to this ministry. Your faithful and generous hearts allow us to continue to provide a safe and healing environment for kids, families and horses.

The majority of you — our donors — have requested that we send receipts electronically. In an effort to serve you and our resources more effectively, starting in 2017, we're transitioning from quarterly paper donation receipts to annual electronic acknowledgements. Donors who have not shared an email address with us will continue to receive paper receipts on an annual basis.

Those that wish to have a receipt on a quarterly basis, please notify the office of Crystal Peaks. If you currently have an email address with the Ranch, but would like to have a paper receipt please let us know how we can best serve you.

Your financial gifts are deeply appreciated and a blessing to everyone here. We remain committed to 'above reproach' stewardship in this ministry. Our continuing passion is that every gift will be utilized in a manner that's most beneficial to each one who comes to the Ranch.

Thank you,
Ellen McBride

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

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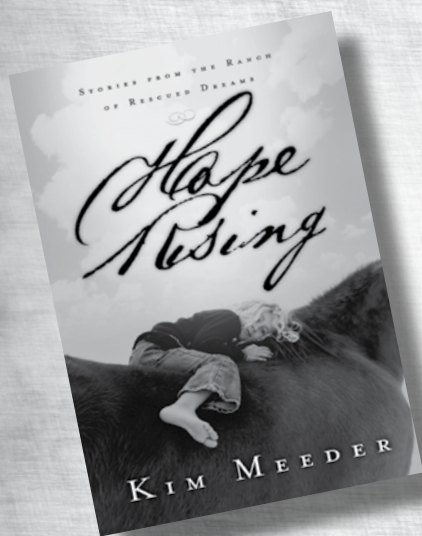
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A New Focus on the Family Interview!



Focus on the Family is commemorating their 40th year of broadcasting, and we've been invited to come and celebrate with them. In their four decades of recording programs to encourage families, the Hope Rising interviews remain on their list of all time favorites.

We're humbled by the offer to return, and grateful, excited, eager for this incredible opportunity to make much of all that Jesus has done in the last few years.

We'll be returning to Colorado Springs on June 7th and sitting down in the recording studio at 11:00 am to tape a new show with our dear friends. This broadcast will be released to over 130 million known listeners. Please join us in prayer that the message of the Gospel of Christ will be clearly spoken and countless listeners will be encouraged into a deeper, personal relationship with Jesus.

The air date of the interview is currently scheduled to be released on the 13th and 14th of July. We'll keep you posted! Thank you dear ones for praying with us.

Your Ranch Family

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.