

HOPE FOR THE FAMILY

SPRING 2017

AROUND the FIRE

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

★ GIVE THANKS ★

BY ANN HAWLEY
(Local Volunteer Coordinator)

Do you ever wonder what God's will is for your life?

How often we pray, "Lord, please show me Your will!" And yet, His will is made very clear in Scripture: "Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's WILL for you who belong to Christ Jesus." 1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NLT).

Webster's dictionary defines *thankfulness* as: "Feeling or expressing gratitude; appreciative." I would argue that thankfulness—in its purest form—is a state of being. It's a choice, not simply a response to our circumstances. Thankfulness is a conscious decision, and an essential part of worship.

Born out of both joy and sorrow, I've also been on a personal journey of thankfulness. It's a course in which I'm learning to purposefully choose a thankful heart. Viewing

life through the lens of thanksgiving has radically changed my outlook.

I know that this process is familiar to many of the volunteers who serve at the Ranch as well. I'm frequently humbled by watching them actively live out thankfulness in the midst of their own suffering.

I'd like to share a few of their journeys . . .

SUZI'S STORY

Suzi recently moved to Bend from Washington. She and her husband, Bob always dreamed of retiring here to enjoy all the beauty and outdoor activities that Central Oregon has to offer. She's a new, enthusiastic volunteer at Crystal Peaks and her warm, lively attitude is contagious.

Recently, we were pulling weeds in the orchard together. My new friend seemed quiet and lost in thought. When I gently pursued her, she shared that her husband had been experiencing numbness and pain in his hands and feet. After many appointments with specialists, he was finally diagnosed with a rare progressive autoimmune disease. Only a few months ago he was a healthy and robust outdoorsman, now he was losing muscle control in his arms and legs.

Concern was evident on Suzi's face as she explained the seriousness of his diagnosis. What she didn't know on that hot June day was that the following month—she too, would be dealt a serious diagnosis.

Suzi had pancreatic cancer.

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Photo: Jeff Woodford



Photo: Suzi Scarino

How could such a seemingly vibrant, healthy woman be dealing with such a horrific disease?

Of all the responses she could've had—in the midst of her suffering—this is the message I received from her just shortly before her recent surgery:

“As I sit here in my very comfy chair in the chemo infusion room, all hooked up for treatment, I feel an overwhelming sense of peace and contentment. I'm grateful for being in this room and getting treatment because so many times pancreatic cancer is a silent killer. I'm thankful for the staff here because they're all consistently so very positive, encouraging, caring and supportive to the patients.

There's a sense of *joy* here. There's a feeling of hope and encouragement as well. I wasn't looking forward to this journey—the fight of my life. However, it's been an amazing experience of learning to take one day at a time and to be grateful for how much I've been blessed in my life.

I give the glory to God. He is the One carrying me through this trial in the palm of His mighty hand. I've also been given the opportunity to witness to others about how the Lord is working in my life—giving me peace beyond understanding.

One of cancer's most precious

and unexpected gifts has been the discovery of how many people care about me. That brings tears of joy to my eyes. I've been especially blessed with a supportive and loving husband, who despite his own recent health crisis, has given his all to be by my side. The Lord uses difficult times for *His* purposes. It seems to me that God is using this time to refine me. I'm grateful for this opportunity to *be grateful* in the midst of my cancer diagnosis. I've asked the Lord to change me and make me more like Jesus. I'm not afraid to die, because I know where I'm going. It's a win/win for me no matter how it turns out!”

Within a seemingly hopeless situation, thankfulness originated—and was chosen—from God's abounding grace.

An amazing thing happens when we praise God and give Him thanks. There's a snowball effect of gratitude that causes thankfulness to enter the hearts of those around us. This avalanche of thankfulness provides hope, healing, comfort and peace. Writer Ann Voskamp, states, “A life contemplating the blessings of Christ becomes a life acting the love of Christ . . . How can this not be the best thing for the world? For us? . . . And as long as thanks is possible, then joy is also possible.

MELISSA'S STORY

Melissa is a nurse, a missionary and a mighty warrior who serves on the battlefield of Bangkok. She works tirelessly to rescue young women and girls from the ravages of the sex-trafficking industry. What she sees on a daily basis would make the hardest soul weep. And yet, she's thankful for the opportunity to serve God among

Thailand's poorest people.

When Melissa came to the Ranch as a short-term volunteer last summer, she'd just returned from Thailand. She stayed at the ranch to regain strength for the next round of battle. She was weary but still filled with hope.

Having returned to Thailand, Melissa recently wrote to me from her mission post:

“I'm thankful for the lessons I've learned from the women who've been trafficked into prostitution, for the lessons I've learned from my family and for the lessons I've learned from those God has placed in my life. Through many tribulations we enter the Kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). Peter tells us that when we suffer, when difficulties arise, we have the opportunity to be perfected and strengthened. God's highest desire for



Photo: Dierdre Gomez

my life is to *reflect Him*.

In order for that to happen, I must be tested, I must be tried, I must be put in the fire so that impurities surface and God can remove them, shaping this jar of clay to be more like Him.

I praise Him in the process. I praise Him in the difficulties. I praise Him for His presence. I praise Him for His refining fire. We have the promise in Isaiah 43:1-3, that if we press into God when we pass through difficulties, He will be with us. Relationships are hard. Working in a foreign country with trafficked women is hard. Living in this fallen world is hard. But these are the things God uses to bring us closer to Him.”

Again, Ann Voskamp explains: “The practice of giving thanks: this is the way we practice the presence of God. We stay present to His presence, and it is always a practice of the eyes. We don’t have to change *what* we see, only the *way* we see.”

Not surprisingly, allowing our circumstances to dictate our outlook is one of the enemy’s favorite tactics to try and steal our joy. According to the author, Nancy Leigh Demoss, “Ingratitude is our first step away from God.” Conversely, Scripture tells us that God inhabits the praises of His people (Psalm 22:3). So if we’re interested in practicing the presence of God, the best way to start is to *praise Him!*

LEIGH’S STORY

The light that radiates through Leigh is a beacon to those who are searching. She regularly takes other volunteers under her wing and prays with them, loves them where they’re at and frequently feeds them! Leigh’s joy belies her journey.

She’s traveled a road paved with broken relationships, a stressful move, an

all but empty nest, a physical illness that has confounded doctors, the loss of her home and complete financial devastation in a once-thriving business. And yet through all these trials the Lord has woven within her a tapestry of hope, redemption and joy.

In describing her ability to remain thankful in the midst of her suffering, Leigh gives all the glory to God:

“I’m most thankful for Jesus’ ability to love me in spite of all my mistakes. I don’t understand how His love can be so forgiving. I’m in my mid-fifties and I feel like I’m in kindergarten at times when it comes to doing life well. I’ve messed up in some really big ways and He always takes my hand and finishes the battle with me. Yes, I have to invite Him in because He is such a gentleman. And yes, I have to repent and choose a different road. But when I do both of those things, His mercy and grace are never ending. It’s absolutely mind-blowing how He never gives up on me.

It’s been a gut-wrenching, painful and devastating journey to endure but—as I trust Him more—my earthly relationships become stronger and healthier. I’m no longer letting my circumstances dictate my attitude and steal my joy. In spite of the seemingly hopeless circumstances surrounding me, I’m claiming victory! I’m no longer in doubt! I’m starting to memorize Scripture and it’s working! When I start doubting—**BOOM**—I recite His Word and the doubt is gone.”

HORATIO’S STORY

Horatio Spafford isn’t a volunteer at Crystal Peaks. But many of you may recognize his name and know his story. In 1873, following the death of his four daughters, he wrote the hymn *It Is Well With My Soul*. He penned the lyrics as he sailed across the same water where his daughters’ ship went down and they drowned:

*“When peace like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.”*

By choosing thankfulness we refocus our attention on God . . . rather than our problems.

Is gratitude always possible, even in the center of grief? We may never understand why God allows certain circumstances to come into our lives, but we *do* know that He is good and faithful. So by faith, we can *choose* to praise Him.

As we surrender and make a choice to trust Him, He begins to rebuild our hope-peace-joy. The Lord regularly uses loss to bring about rich blessings, renewal, and glory . . . just as He did with His own Son.

THANKFULNESS—It’s a radical journey and a daily choice. It’s changing my life and my heart. It’s a leap of faith that can change yours as well.



Photo: Sarah Aydt

VICTORY

BY KIM MEEDER

God is GOOD all the time.

Our circumstances and emotions have no bearing on this truth. Our perceptions cannot unravel or fray the very nature of our King. When our experiences negatively rock our world . . . they don't rock His. And when our focus is on *His* world, we won't rock either.

I've heard Pastor Bill Johnson say, "You can only have authority over the storms you can sleep through." In Matthew 8:23-27, Jesus and the disciples found themselves in an unexpected savage storm. The disciples were focused on the power of the storm—and their hearts melted with fear. Jesus was focused only on the power of the One who **CONTROLS** the storm—and His heart melted into pure peace—as evidenced by the fact that he was able to sleep through what others thought would destroy them.

The single difference between Jesus and the disciples was where their focus rested. We have this *same* choice. We can choose to focus on our great big **PROBLEMS**—or—our **GREAT BIG GOD!** Despite our words, our true choice will be evidenced in what our life produces . . . peace—or panic?

It was a Sunday morning in January. The thermometer outside the kitchen window was flat-lined at zero. Appearing to be in no particular hurry, the last few snowflakes wafted down, seemingly oblivious to the monstrous storm that preceded them. Seated in our living room before a large window, Troy and I were praying side by side. The view was glorious. From the elevation of our home, we could see over much of the three ranch properties. Every blade, branch and

building was buried under several feet of pure white peace.

I was on my knees, arms open, palms forward, praising Jesus for the abundance of life giving snow that had blanketed our high desert region. Together we prayed over the New Year and all that our Almighty would choose to fill it with. We prayed that His Spirit, His very Presence would fill, cover and flow through us just as the pure white snow before us consumed all in deep white folds.

I'd just started to pray that He would reveal anything in our hearts, lives or ministry that could hinder or quench the flow of His Spirit. Suddenly, across the way on the West Ranch, a visual 'vacancy' appeared, instantly followed by an explosion! A HUGE plume rose ominously over the shop and indoor arena! My stunned prayer was nothing more than, "Jesus! Jesus! JESUS!"

Quickly pulling on our winter gear, we rushed down to see what had happened. We arrived to discover that the entire indoor arena had violently collapsed under the weight of the snow. In a single moment, my mind raced through endless scenarios. *Was someone inside?*

Are they hurt? Are they pinned? Holy Spirit HELP! Going down a mental checklist, I realized that all but one of the four nearby families were either out of town or not home.

But one family WAS home, and it was part of their morning routine to enter this building, load up a tractor with hay and take it out to our herd of horses. Forsaking all logical caution, we squeezed through a buckled section between the crumpled door and wall. Once inside, the devastation was staggering.

Because this indoor arena was dark and dusty, it was put to good use by storing all of our ranch equipment under

Photo: Kim Meeder

its expansive roof. Trucks, tractors, horse trailers and all our haying implements had been stored here. Now, this once neatly organized space . . . was unrecognizable!

Huge support beams came down with such force that they fractured into a billion shards of splintered wood. Metal reinforcements now lay twisted under the rubble. Although



Photo: Kim Meeder

the sidewalls remained relatively intact, the weight of the snow completely overwhelmed the trusses load bearing limits, resulting in complete failure, with the greatest damage down the center of the structure.

Everything inside this building now lay buried under tons of debris, ice and snow. Troy and I wiggled back out through the narrow opening just in time to see Jeff and his little boy Peter—our adopted grandson—arrive. They were SAFE!

Jeff shared how he was just leaving with Peter when his wife, Kelsie asked if she could take a quick shower before he stepped out. Slightly frustrated for the delay, Jeff stayed inside a few moments longer to watch over their newest arrival, three week old Benjamin.

Upon hearing the story, the Holy Spirit revealed His plan. Liquid gratitude filled my eyes as the realization of what should have happened . . . *didn't*. With a heart flooding with thanksgiving, I spoke my thoughts, “Jeff, do you understand that the Lord used your wife’s shower to delay you enough to save your life and the life of your son?” Emerging recognition transformed his face into an expression that I’ll never forget.

We also learned that Harold, another resident on ranch property, had come down earlier to use the small tractor to free his truck from snow. He returned the tractor inside the arena only moments before it came crushing down.

Our gratitude spiraled up from one singular truth—splintered wood and twisted metal can all be replaced . . . *loved ones cannot*.

After several trips down to the collapsed arena, Troy and I returned to our home. Stripping off all my layers of winter gear, I carefully hung each item back onto the hooks by our front door. I walked back into the living room and stood motionless before the great windows. Without warning, my heart was overwhelmed with the same adrenalized shaky feeling one would have after witnessing a fatal accident—but everyone walked away unharmed.



Photo: Katie Jacobsen

“When we’re listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit and looking for HIS victory . . . we will see it EVERYWHERE!”

The Holy Spirit’s presence was palpable. Heaven came to earth—certain death was thwarted. The weight of this truth sent silent tears streaming down my face. This day could’ve turned out so differently. In that moment I could’ve fallen to the floor grieving unfathomable loss. Instead, I fell to my knees in immeasurable gratitude.

Streams of praises poured from my mouth. Arms lifted in chorus with a heart overflowing with thankfulness. As if answering in a celestial ‘call and response’, rays of sunlight broke through a small window in the somber gray of the sky. Pure light streamed over pure white—creating a blinding array of what pure holiness must look like.

Igniting within my heart, His voice burned through, “LOOK . . . My promises are NEW!” Glancing up, that’s when it caught my eye. Forming in a perfectly vertical line, a very rare FIRE RAINBOW appeared—directly over the collapsed arena!

Defying the heavy drab sky, the fire rainbow blazed against impossible odds. Literally searing through the gray, it gained intensity for about 60 seconds. And then, as if it were a wink from the Father Himself, it vanished nearly as quickly as it emerged.

Some might dismiss it as a natural phenomenon, a coincidence or another explanation that fits within the tiny confines of human logic. But this daughter of the King saw it—and received it—as a promise sent from her Dad, wrapped in a package that she would recognize. The message was simple, “Beloved, I’ve got your circumstances, I’ve got a plan and I’ve got you—once again—I’ve proven that I can be TRUSTED!”



Photo: Kim Meeder

GOD IS GOOD ALL THE TIME.

Our circumstances and emotions have no bearing on this truth. Our perceptions cannot unravel or fray the very nature of our King. When our experiences negatively rock our world . . . they don’t rock His. And when our focus is on His world, we won’t rock either. Just like Jesus, we too will be able to ‘sleep’ through the storms.



Photo: Kim Meeder

“O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good: for His mercy endureth forever.” (Ps. 136:1) KJV.

Together let’s choose to “give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good.” Friends, no matter what this new season heralds within your heart, no matter what challenges you might face . . . this message stands true for ALL. God IS good. We can trust Him for the victory. So, regardless of what our future holds, let’s worship Him with hearts filled with gratitude . . . every day . . . through every circumstance.

Disclaimers:

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.

POSTSCRIPT:

Three days later, the ranch mechanic shop—the remaining eastern portion of the same building—also collapsed. Like the arena, it came down in such a strategically safe way. No one was hurt. Once ALL the trusses failed on both sides of a single dividing wall, we began the process of carefully evaluating how to proceed.

As much as I could safely manage, I was tasked with documenting photographically all the pulverized equipment inside. Carefully maneuvering through the crush, the Holy Spirit opened my eyes to see something astonishing.

This building was 168 feet long and 72 feet wide. It had 14 trusses, each being 12 inches wide and spaced 12 feet apart. When these massive structures collapsed over our four trucks, three horse trailers, two tractors, a CAT, hay rake, hay baler, bale wagon, hay mower, manure spreader, flatbed trailer, and various other ranch implements . . . they crushed down BETWEEN each one! Over twenty pieces of heavy equipment—parked at ‘random’—were each miraculously located EXACTLY between the devastating force of every single truss! One truck was so narrowly missed that the side-view mirrors were sliced off! But the



Photo: Kim Meeder

truck itself sustained only a few minor dents! Of all the ranch rolling fleet, only one steel stock trailer was hit by a truss. The beam was deflected by the hayrack and the trailer sustained no damage.

It's true we can choose to focus on our great big problems—or—our GREAT BIG GOD! As we enter 2017, it's no coincidence that the number 17 in scripture is the symbol used to represent VICTORY. When we're listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit and looking for HIS victory . . . *we will see it EVERYWHERE!*



Photo: Kim Meeder

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

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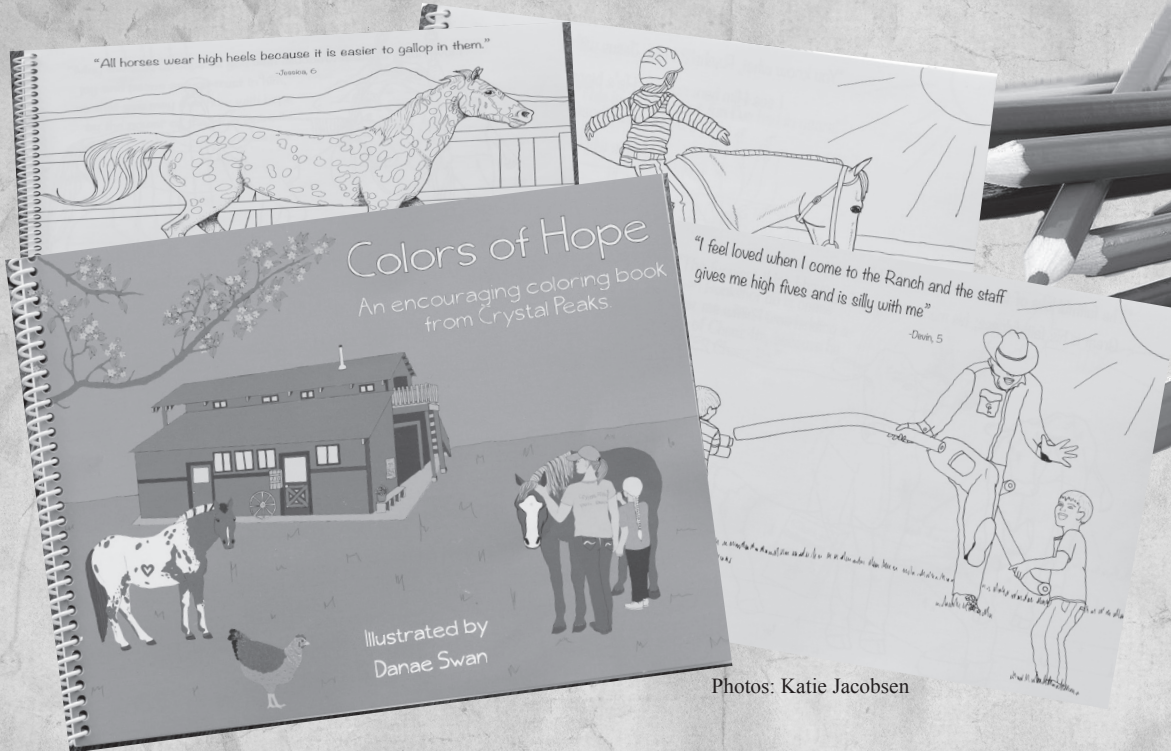
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CRYSTAL PEAKS NOW HAS IT'S VERY OWN COLORING BOOK!



Photos: Katie Jacobsen

**Find Colors of
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Partnering with local artist Danae Swan, Crystal Peaks now offers a 48-page coloring book that's ready to become your own family's work of art. The book is filled with hand-drawn pictures representing some of your favorite Ranch sights. Each page is a sweet combination of our beloved Ranch kids' quotes and Bible verses. This would make a fun gift for the artist in your family.