

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

RESTORING HOSANNA

By Sarah Robinett

Sitting down at my desk, I purposed to review a new horse donation application. My assistant, Deirdre, had already alerted me to the high potential of this prospect. In every way, the horse appeared to be an exceptional fit for our session program.

The gelding was a large, 16 year-old Pony of Americas/Quarter Horse. His bright white coat was splashed with an even covering of red and black polka-dots—a fun color pattern known in the horse world as "leopard appaloosa." The horse's health, training and temperament all spoke volumes of how he had been lovingly cared for and handled.

"On paper," this unique boy appeared to be a wonderfully gentle, beautiful and rideable horse. For all these reasons, if he had been listed on the horse market, he would have instantly been purchased for a high price.

Reading further, a wave of sorrow washed over my heart as I took in the story of why he needed a new home.

Owning him from near birth, it was clear the woman who contacted us adored her precious horse. The only reason Jody sought a new home for him was because of tremendous personal hardship. After twenty-five years of marriage her husband left her and their two daughters. In the process, she not only lost her husband, she also lost her home. Now, this heartbroken woman was left to try and place the remaining shattered fragments of her beloved family.

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By the time she contacted us, all but one of her horses had found a home. Without the ability to pay for board, but unwilling to sell her highly prized four-footed friend, Jody sought another option.

Humbly, she offered to gift her horse to Crystal Peaks.

With gratitude and wonder, we arranged a time to go meet her beloved boy.



When the day finally arrived, several staff and I made the twohour drive over the mountains. While driving through the charred ruins of one town after another that had been incinerated in the horrific 2020 wildfires, my mind seemed to also burn. The blackened remains felt like a visual parallel of the scarring left on the family we were about to meet. Jody, her girls, her parents and their horses, had all been through a similar black devastation. The twisted framework of their demolished hopes and dreams must have been as raw and brittle as the melted iron beams of the fallen structures we passed. Burned, abandoned, and homeless, they were left to rebuild with little but ash.

"Oh Jesus," we prayed, "Let us know how to love and help this family.

Please Jesus, restore their hope and joy."

Soon, we neared the end of a winding road. A beautiful woman waved us into the barnyard. Jody approached us with her horse in hand. Tears of love for her four-footed companion streaked her face. Although it was the right thing to do, it was heart wrenching for her to even consider placing him into another home. She had lost her marriage, her family, her home—and now—she was losing her beloved horse.

Even from behind the tears, Jody met us with a bright smile and what looked like a difficult mix of joy and grief in her eyes. Quietly, she shared how she believed God had a special plan for her horse. More than all other things, she wanted him to be an instrument for others to know the hope of Jesus Christ.

Despite the loss and pain of her own life, Jody chose to lay every piece of her broken family at the feet of Jesus. Her tangible faith in God's promises rocked each of us. There was not a dry eye in the barn.

Staying the course for which we had come, we proceeded with our routine evaluation. Jody's horse exemplified all that we look for in a children's mount.



"Hosanna means 'God saves.' Because of this truth, no matter what we face—we are free to celebrate."

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With kindness and respect, he complied with our requests. His sense of humor also surfaced when she pulled out the tiniest of mints, a single tic-tac. Eager for the minty treat, the spotted horse raised his upper lip in a goofy equine grin.

By the end of our time with him, we knew the children of Crystal Peaks would absolutely love this stellar gelding. Both parties agreed to take two weeks to pray over the best place for him and seek God's will within each of our hearts.

During the two weeks, I dreamt about Jody's horse. In the dream, God gave me a new name for him. I argued with God because I thought it sounded feminine, even girly. Nevertheless, when I woke up the next morning, God's chosen name—and command—continued to echo in my heart.

I shared my dream with Kim and Deirdre, who also had been praying. This was only part of many confirmations to open our arms wide to receive this special gift. Deirdre called and spoke with Jody, and found a date that worked to pick up our newest equine companion.

The only day that worked for everyone was Friday, April 2nd. When I realized the significance of this date, my jaw dropped in amazement. The day we were picking this gelding up was the Friday before Easter. The name God specifically told me to give this horse in my dream was "Hosanna."



I thought about the beautiful horse coming from a broken family. His whole life, home and place of safety had fallen apart. Like an earthquake splitting a rift in solid rock, the polarizing divide of divorce tore a chasm in what he knew as a loving home. Suddenly, this precious horse was falling through the cracks.

In the midst of the terrible plunge,

the displaced horse landed safely in the palms of the Savior's scarred hands.

Thinking of what his new life would look like at Crystal Peaks, I imagined the laughter and love that would soon surround him. I could envision children using his unique coat as a canvas for beautiful, hand-painted masterpieces. His entire appearance already looked like a confetti-filled party.

A smile spread across my face and I again thought of his new name, "Hosanna." Indeed, God *had* saved him . . . and was preparing to fill and surround him with joyful celebration.

Similar to this horse, Jesus is doing the same for Jody and her beloved daughters. Our Savior desires to do this for every broken child—(and mom and dad)—who also feel like they are falling through the cracks of unexpected sorrow. Already, this horse's story was becoming an example for many. When God saves, He restores our joy.

A few weeks later, Kim and I returned to pick up Hosanna . . . and we were amazed by what we saw. On the way, we were delayed a full hour due to the fire damage clean-up and new construction within the burned areas. Fallen, black trees were being harvested for lumber. Power lines were restrung. Grass was growing. Flowers were blooming. Rebuilding had begun and new life was spreading across the land. The prior darkness was being consumed by light.

Arriving at the barn, Jody, her girls and her parents all met us for the special occasion. With tearful generosity, they led one of their most treasured family members into the horse trailer. Hosanna followed with

trust and confidence. While most horses call nervously when leaving their companions, Hosanna stood peacefully.

He appeared to already know that God had caught him and was placing him securely.

All too soon, Jody and her dear ones sent us off with loads of love . . . and with a pocket full of tic-tacs.

Matthew 21:9-11a says: "The crowds that went ahead of him [Jesus] and those that followed shouted, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' 'Hosanna in the highest heaven!' When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, 'Who is this?' The crowds answered, 'This is Jesus...'"

Hosanna means "God saves."

Because of this truth, no matter what we face—we are free to celebrate.

And "Hosanna" also invites the question . . . "Who is this? Who can save like that? Who has such wonderful power to restore joy?" Like Jody, we already have the answer: Jesus.

If you are struggling through a wildfire of hurt and devastation . . . if you are displaced from every form of security . . . if you feel as if you're falling through the cracks of shattered promises and broken dreams . . . there is One who is

waiting to catch you. Reach for the hand of hope that has always been reaching for you—His name is Jesus. When He saves—He restores your joy.

What seemed like the end of the story for this horse . . . was actually the beginning. What might feel like the end of the story for you—in the hands of Jesus—is only the framework for His beautiful rebuilding.

Like Hosanna, through the black ashes of your circumstances, will you trust and follow the Savior's gentle leading into a new life?

For those who accept His free gift of salvation—a family bigger than one could ever imagine—waits with open arms.

Hosanna will forever remind us . . . Jesus is faithful . . . to rebuild and restore.

His Banner Over

"He has brought me to his banquet hall, and his banner over me is love." (Song of Songs 2:4, NASB)

An older man's voice reached out through the phone line, "My wife, Bella, and I are considering donating her mare to Crystal Peaks . . ." On the other end of the call, I scribbled hasty notes as he spoke. The man continued, "We're aging and know there will come a time when we won't be able to care for our horses like we want to. And, we just don't ride much anymore."

After hearing a bit of rustling, a woman's voice faintly rose through the receiver. I felt myself lean forward to try and catch her every soft word.

"Yes, I feel I'm not giving my horse the attention she deserves," Bella confided. The emotional quiver behind Bella's words mirrored a deep, selfless love for her mount. "She is quiet and kind. I believe she would make a wonderful children's horse . . ." Her voice trailed off.

My hand wrote quickly in an attempt to capture each bit of vital information. Bella and Jesse lived close to the Ranch. In addition, the thoughtful couple also offered several other horses they might be interested in gifting to Crystal Peaks.

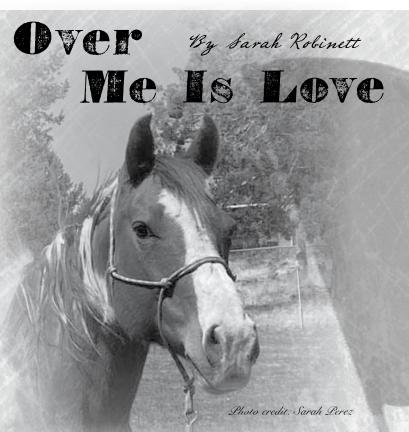
Intrigued and moved by their heartfelt offer, I assured Bella that the Ranch team would pray over them and their situation. Once I sensed the Lord encouraging us forward, a time was arranged to meet the endearing couple and their beloved equines.

Not long after, on a blistering summer's day, the Ranch team made their way to Bella and Jesse's property. As they turned into the driveway, my assistant, Deirdre, and I noticed the impeccably manicured grounds and spotless paddocks. Clearly, the couple worked hard to care for their treasured animals and the land that supported them.

After a warm welcome from Jesse and Bella, we were led toward the paddocks that housed their small herd. A gorgeous mare with a blonde palomino coat greeted the little group. They introduced the mare as Bella's personal mount, a gaited Paso Fino cross. This was the horse that Bella—out of her exceeding kindness—was willing to gift to Crystal Peaks.

Humbled by the gracious offer, Deirdre and I spent the next hour interacting with the special equine. After evaluating the mare's response to groundwork and time in the saddle, we had enough information to pray about our decision. It seemed clear the kind mare would be a strong prospect for our children's program.

When returning the gentle palomino to her paddock, a lean paint mare caught my attention. Although officially evaluating the mare's golden pasture mate, I shifted my focus and asked about the horse across the adjoining fence line. In contrast to her fancy gaited companion, the red and white mare that drew my notice was built with the sturdy frame of a workhorse. But her heavier build did not hide the silent fact that she was underweight. The mare's inward and withdrawn expression spoke loudly to my heart.



With his amiable smile, Jesse shared what he knew about the mare. Earlier, the paint mare was his trail horse, but she had not been ridden in several years. Jesse explained how he thought the mare likely missed the time and attention of carrying a rider.

I placed my hands over the horse's spotted coat. In that single moment I felt the Lord whisper within my heart, "Her name will be Banner."

Curious, but out of time for another thorough evaluation on a second horse, Deirdre and I assured the couple that we would be in touch. On the way back to the Ranch, Deirdre confirmed how the paint mare had also captured her heart. For a yet unknown reason, God was specifically highlighting—not the horse we came to see—but the horse we nearly overlooked.

After prayerful deliberation and with gentle respect, the Ranch declined the gorgeous palomino. Instead, our team felt led to carefully ask the couple if they would be willing to release the slim paint mare for adoption.

True to their kind and generous nature, Jesse and Bella answered with a resounding, "Yes." Bella was thrilled to keep her beloved companion—and—a mare who longed for a rider would come to the Ranch where there were MANY children to love.

Neither Jesse, Bella nor the Ranch staff had any idea what was about to unfold. God was positioning the spotted horse within a perfectly timed rescue mission . . . to set in motion a perfectly timed rescue of one of His precious daughters.

The day before the mare would arrive at Crystal Peaks, the Ranch hosted Refuge, an outdoor worship gathering. Before the event, I joined the worship team privately in prayer. During this time, one of the vocalists was overcome with compassion and began weeping. Following an urgency

in her spirit, the singer shared how she felt someone would be coming who had recently relapsed into addiction. She sensed they were fighting for their life and desperately needed the transforming freedom of Christ's love.

Through prayer, the team asked Jesus to extend His loving rescue to break the cycle of lies entrapping this mystery soul.

The evening of worship unfolded like a powerful river of gratitude and celebration. As only the Holy Spirit can orchestrate—at the very end of the night—a single girl was highlighted.

Under the shadows of the night sky, I found Kim praying with a small group of visitors. Straining to see through the darkness, I noticed a tall and slender girl. The look of deep hopelessness shrouding the teen's face told me *this* was the mystery soul . . . a child.

Stirring down through the darkness like a vortex of light, I remembered the thin paint horse. Like a piece of broken mirror, the dejected mare reflected a nearly identical image of the inward and withdrawn girl. The silent parallel shook my heart.

Within the gathering night, a quiet conversation unfolded between us. "Madelyn," confided she had recently relapsed into a lethal eating disorder. By falling backward into this ferocious battle, suicidal lies and self-harm were her constant attackers.

While listening intently, I realized how God had already arranged for the new paint horse to arrive the next morning. Although the mare was well cared for and supremely loved—like Madelyn—she was arriving with a less than normal bodyweight for her size.

Clearly seeing the parallel between the horse—and the girl before me—a thought poured into my mind.

Speaking to Madelyn, I explained the mare's situation and observed the uncertain expression on her face. I pressed in, "Tomorrow we have a spotted horse coming to live at the Ranch. Would you like to join us in the morning to meet and welcome her?" Without waiting for a response, I continued, "We would really appreciate your help inviting this horse into her new home. What she needs most is just a little extra love and care right now."

Through the darkness, I could see an ember of quiet connection grow within Madelyn's eyes. She responded thoughtfully, "Kinda like me?"

I smiled in agreement, "Yes, kinda like you."

In the following days, Madelyn came often to spend time with "Banner." Through patient love and care, the painted horse settled into her new life at Crystal Peaks. Within a few short weeks, Madelyn became the first teen to ride Banner. On that day, between horse and rider, it was difficult to tell just who was smiling more.

Later, while grooming her equine friend, Madelyn heard the full story of the mare's initial evaluation. When I mentioned how God mysteriously spoke Banner's name—the girl froze—holding her brush in midair.

"Wait . . . what . . . when was that?" Madelyn faltered.

Curious about the girl's unusual response, I repeated the timeline. Madelyn stammered in awe, "That was the time that I relapsed."

Pure wonder streamed across Madelyn's face as she realized how God was systematically displaying His love for her—in a way that could not be explained by "coincidence." Only Jesus could miraculously align each moment and every detail to show a hurting girl just how much He loved her.

While Madelyn was slipping back toward hopelessness—the Lord was securing the adoption of a horse—who would draw her back toward wholeness. When she felt alone in a losing battle—God called prayer warriors who had never met her—to intercede on her behalf. And when Madelyn felt lost and unnoticed within a crowd, she was chosen—apart from all others—to welcome a new horse who mirrored her heart.

"He has brought me to his banquet hall, and his banner over me is love." (Song of Songs 2:4, NASB)

Through her specific journey, a girl watched as God wove His strong threads of love, hope and truth within her life circumstances into a beautiful tapestry . . . a banner of His love over her.

In one child's blackest night, God unfurled His brilliant banner of love against the darkness that warred for her heart.



Like Madelyn, many are starving to know the love of God. Jesus Christ invites everyone to surrender fighting their painful battles with their own strength and come under His streaming standard of love. He beckons all to lay down our struggles and join Him in His banquet hall. Held within this place—every lie, every fiery arrow aimed at our hearts—cannot touch us when we choose to rest under the banner of His love.

Similar to this girl, will you take a moment to consider all the ways God has revealed His unique love for you? Will you allow His truths to blanket your heart with trust? And—as the name of our painted horse reminds us—will you face each lie of discouragement warring against you by raising up His banner of love for you?

For those who choose to rest beneath this blessed covering, God supplies a continual feast of His joy, peace and presence.

4



Ojava is a special horse. Her unique background began when she was born at Crystal Peaks as the daughter of one of the founding four horses. As a long yearling, she was sold to a good home in an effort to help support the Ranch during its humble beginnings. Thirteen years later, the sweet offer came to the Ranch to receive her back into her original home—with us. We were thrilled to reconnect with a horse that has such deep roots here.

In Ojava's early life, her fine breeding and athleticism led her to be shown in high levels as a dressage horse. Because she is still a newer horse to our session program, many staff have spent intensive time training and preparing her heart and mind to be ready for the kids who come here. Although, I have not had many experiences connecting with Ojava—the few I've had—have been powerful for me. It's been special to see how much she's grown since her return.

At first, our black mare was mostly anxious and restless. Over time, her heart has calmed as she discovers and settles into her place here.

Last year, I had the experience of joining Ojava in the round pen. A join-up typically involves sending the horse in a large circle around the person in the center. Simply stated, when the horse shows signs that they want to trust the person in the middle and be with them—rather than off on their own—the horse will be invited into a circle of love.

A join-up is most often used to establish a bond of trust with the horse and rider. It also helps build a respectful relationship and a better understanding between the two. While doing this with Ojava, she showed all the usual signs of wanting to be with me, so I invited her in.

When she came close, she followed me wherever I went. Yet, I noticed something important. She was only following me with her body. I could clearly see her heart was distant and distracted. I couldn't seem to genuinely get her attention. As I moved, she moved, going through the motions by habit—instead of by heart. Although with me, she kept calling to her horse friends. Her eyes continued to dart around in anxiety . . . instead of remaining fixed on me.

As I noticed this, God started to speak. He showed me how—at times—my heart can be like hers. Sometimes I follow Jesus in my actions only, while my heart remains detached. I have followed Jesus to places far from my home. I have followed Him in ways which made me uncomfortable. I have done what He has asked on the outside—when my inside didn't want

to. There have been times when I've forgotten that giving Him my heart completely and continually is what He most deeply desires.

Photo credit: Sarah Perez

By Lorissa Ziemer

My heart is prone to wander. I get anxious. I struggle simply being still before Him. I look at what other people are doing and wonder if I should be doing that too. I sometimes get lost in the motions of being a "good Christian." How sad this is and how far it is from God's heart for us!

Psalm 51 says, "You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one. You do not want a burnt offering. The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God." (vs. 16-17, NLT)

When I'm like Ojava, I'm simply running around following Jesus in the ways *I think* will please Him. I'm caught up in doing things *for* Him—instead of simply being *with* Him. When I'm in this mindset—my heart isn't completely His.

"I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance . . . You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first." (Revelation 2:2a, 3-5a, NIV)

The Lord has been leading my heart toward repentance. I can easily get caught up in doing hard work for Him and persevering through hard things, yet, often I've forgotten Him as my first love.

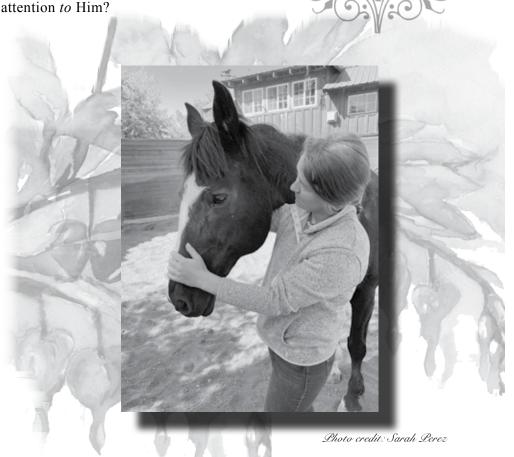
Today, I encourage you to think of things that might turn your gaze away from the Lord. Do you follow Him with joy in the ways He asks you to? Or, are you reluctant to do what He requests? Are you anxiously pursuing things that He did not ask of you? What have you prioritized over your relationship with God? How can you surrender your heart to Him more fully? Moment by moment, are you caught up in doing all the good things *for* Him while not fully surrendering your heart and attention to Him?

The Lord is so good to us, His patience is so amazing. I'm overwhelmed by His pursuit of my heart to be completely surrendered to Him. Sometimes I struggle with wanting to be farther along in this journey than where I currently am, but He reminds me through His Word that "... He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion ..." (Philippians 1:6, NIV).

My focus is to keep walking in repentance when I'm wrong and to keep my heart fixed on Him alone.

This year, Ojava has changed and grown so much. Recently, I was working with her and she has become much more quiet and peaceful. I've noticed her prior anxiety nearly vanish. As I've seen change in Ojava's heart, I've seen a similar change in my heart.

Jesus desires each of our hearts to be continually open, devoted and surrendered to Him. And always holding close this truth: HE—is our first love.



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.

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