

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

# AROUND the FIRE

WINTER 2015

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

## LOVE—The Tie that Binds

BY KIM MEEDER

**LOVE.** Throughout scripture, it's referred to as the highest standard of human bonding—the greatest gift—God HIMSELF.

God's love is so all-consuming that it heals everything entrusted to its dominion. Nothing held up by the human heart can withstand its authority to redeem. The

love of God is so prevailing that it calls us throughout our lifetime to turn to it, yield to it, revel in it and ultimately... give it away.

The love of God heals everything it contacts. It builds bridges into the human heart that no man can tear down. It's not confined to boundary, time zone, distance or decade. There's no force in this world that can extinguish the mighty love of Jesus.

Three years ago, to celebrate our combined birthdays and anniversary, Troy and I traveled to one of our favorite destinations: Alaska. Cradled within raw beauty, we stood thigh-deep in one glacier fed river after another, always casting for the chance to catch salmon.



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Photos: Kim Meeder

After experiencing a multitude of magnificent destinations, we chose to conclude our trip with one of the most awe-inspiring rivers on earth—the Kenai. Its signature milky-aqua color is unique in the world of rivers. The Kenai’s 82-mile course flows through a spectacular array of Alaskan beauty. Much of the rivers shoreline is only accessible by traveling along ‘tunnels’ worn through the thick bush... by the enormous paws of Grizzly Bears. Fact proven when more than once, I placed my hand down for balance right next to massive bear tracks!

Nearing the end of our Alaskan adventure, our meandering path toward the airport drew us back into civilization. Unwilling to give up the magnificence of the Kenai River, we chose to fish our last few days in Centennial Park. Even though the park was located within a small town, man-made city limits meant nothing to the local wildlife. Muddy bear tracks gave chilling witness that they preferred the same trails down to the river as the fishermen did. Daily, we encountered bald eagles. On one occasion, we were blessed to see a cow moose with two calves—and gave a wide berth to all—before the protective mother saw us.

Filled to overflowing with incredible

‘gifts’ throughout our trip, we couldn’t have known that the Lord was saving the best for last.

It was our final day on the Kenai River and the fishing was slow. We had fished every hole and seam we could find with our entire arsenal of Alaskan tackle—still nothing. Finally, our desperation drove us

up to a mighty bend in the river where many others were fishing.

I venture in Alaska to experience the wild solitude... not to stand in a crowd and ‘combat fish.’ The prospect of

doing such made my heart a bit sad. While setting up our gear, I noticed a lovely girl making her way toward us. “Hi, I’m Nadia.” In moments, I learned that she was a 13 year-old local and her family daily came to the river to subsistence fish. Her deep brown eyes flashed with passion when she spoke about the love of her family, fishing, and ice-skating.

Innocently unaware, Nadia was charming from every perspective. Dancing in the native sun, her long, glossy black hair shimmered a perfect frame around her beautiful face. Embraced within her brilliant smile was a whimsical little space between her front teeth. Yet, as lovely as she was on the outside, it was her inside that was especially endearing.

Perhaps like meeting a distant relative for the first time, the depths of each of our hearts arched toward the other. Deep was calling out to deep. While sitting on the riverbank, we talked for hours.

During a natural pause in our conversation, we chose

to stretch our legs and move upstream to where her family was fishing. Upon meeting them, again, I found myself in deep dialogue with her mother. Laughter and tears mixed together as life stories poured out as effortlessly as the graceful river that flowed before us.

Friendships were being forged in the flame of genuine love... the love of Jesus.

The gentle man that was Nadia’s father left and soon returned. I watched him produce a small rusty barbeque from his equally rusty family van. With a warm smile, he simply stated, “We’re going to have a barbeque!” I was moved by this man. Though, caught in the midst of great financial challenge, he loved his family well.

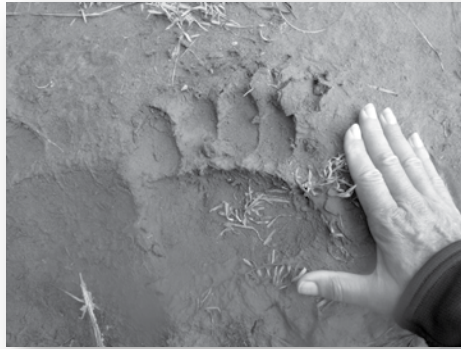
Soon, the fragrant aroma of cooking salmon wafted over us. It was nearly time for their dinner. Not wanting to interrupt such a sweet family moment, I thanked them all for their kindness, fishing tips and a truly memorable day. That’s when the thoughtful father quietly said, “No Kim... this barbeque is for YOU... we want you and Troy to join us.”

I understood enough of their story to realize this was a ‘widow’s mite’ of epic proportion. Produced by the sheer power of generosity, the meager rations we shared became one of the most memorable moments of my life.

With humility and gratitude, we accepted the gift. What followed was an equally epic encounter hallmarked by pure hearted simplicity. Together, we stood around the glowing coals of the barbeque and ate salmon bites with our fingers. The sweet moment was embraced like a diamond held fast within the priceless setting of the Land of the Midnight Sun.

Late into the evening, when the sky began to wane with its own amber glow—it was time to say goodbye. We had known each other for such a short time—truly, only a single day. Now the punctuation that swirled around our final hugs and ended our last sentences to each other... fell in liquid form.

In a way that only Jesus could define, race, region and religion drifted away in the





presence of His all-consuming love. Not confined by the boundaries of men, His ties of love were forged on the banks of the Kenai River, uniting two small families that lived nearly 3000 miles apart.

In the seasons that followed, His love continued to flow through a single thread. Nadia and I remained in contact by spontaneous texting. Through the written word and photographs, I learned of her victories and challenges, her triumphs and defeats. This went on for three years, until one day, everything changed.

Because Jesus is the Author of modern day miracles, on October 26<sup>th</sup>, I stood at the top of the ranch hill in full anticipation of the reunion that approached. Upon seeing them, I shouted, “My Alaskan family has arrived!” The little girl I’d embraced on the Kenai was now as tall as I was. Her lush hair was now cut into a fun shoulder length style. Her deep brown eyes still danced with joy and she still had the same whimsical space between her front teeth. And yes, she was still innocently unaware of her maturing beauty. We hugged long and tight, immersing in the moment. The same tears that washed our departure were now



welcoming our reunion. For two incredible days, we just shared... life.

Other than sitting on a pony for a picture, Nadia had never ridden a horse. I handed her a halter and together we stepped into the main corral. I watched her face as she studied each horse, wondering which might be the one for her. Halo was her choice. During our approach, he turned to look at this new girl, and then reached out to smell her outstretched hand. Upon contact, her head whipped around to look at my face. Without words, her elated expression communicated that she’d just experienced the humbling wonder of a horse *wanting* to know a human.

After that moment, I’m not sure if Nadia ever directly looked at me again. She was completely enthralled by the small Arabian gelding who was fast becoming her special friend. Once on his golden back, I could see evidence of the ice skater that she was. Clearly, when one learns how to balance on a blade of steel on ice... sitting on a moving horse just isn’t that hard. Even though it was her first time, she rode in near perfect balance at a walk, trot and even tried a few lovely cantering passes.

During her time on the ranch, no matter the task, we were always together. Every minute was a precious gift, and we didn’t want to waste even one. Often, when words were not needed, I simply held her hand, giving silent reassurance that the years, which had passed between us, had stolen nothing.

Our time together concluded too fast. Once again, we sat side by side. Although, this time we were not on a riverbank but in old wooden rocking chairs perched high above the ranch. We watched the western sky blaze with the same amber glow as the

coals that once filled their old barbeque.

It was during this moment of profound gratitude that I heard my young friend say, “This has been one of the best days of my life. It’s so peaceful here. I feel so safe. I feel so loved... I feel like I’m home.”

Without looking at her, I simply smiled up at the deep orange sky and thought, ‘Jesus, isn’t that how *everyone* feels when they choose to step into Your presence? Peaceful, safe, loved, home.’



During this blessed season—if we choose to love Jesus over all other things—it’s *His love* that binds us to the promise that when this life is complete, we will enter into His presence. His love is what binds us to Him for eternity.

His love *IS the tie that binds*.

“...He will live with them, and they will be His people. God Himself will be with them. He will remove all of their sorrows, and there will be no more death or sorrows or crying or pain... To all who are thirsty I will give the springs of the water of life without charge! All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be My children.” (Rev. 21:3-4, 6b-7 NLT).

Nadia was right. I know that on that day when I stand before Him, I too, will feel *peaceful, safe, loved, home*.



# GODLY PERSPECTIVE

BY BRAD SHULTZ

**A**s autumn has given way to winter, the calendar has turned to the end of another session season at Crystal Peaks. The off-season is a time of replenishment for horses and staff alike. It's a chance to recharge, refocus, and reflect on the season that has come and gone.

The season itself is a flurry of activity with ups and downs that happen so quickly it's almost incomprehensible to those in the midst of the fray. It's only by looking back on the season that one can truly understand the magnitude of what God has done.

For instance, last year's season began and ended with the saving power of Jesus Christ. A young man gave his life to Christ on the first day of sessions; a young lady gave her life to Christ during the very last session of the season, with many others in between. Through all that happened at the Ranch, the season was truly a testament to the redemptive power of God in the lives of His people.

It makes me happy to look back on each season, trying to see God's perspective and what He was doing. Ministry and life can be hard and often we feel discouraged. Yet, if we take a moment and reflect on all our past hard times that God worked together for His glory, things seem less ominous.

Last fall, God provided a reminder to fix my eyes on Him and try to see things from His perspective.

Rachel and I were invited to Shelbyville, Kentucky to attend a fellowship of Similar Ministry leaders. The event was hosted by Mike and Gaye Cox at Stormhaven Youth Ranch. Ministries from all over the Midwest attended. It was a great time partnering with great people but it was God Who made the fellowship truly special.

We arrived the night before the



fellowship to help set up. Mike would lead the devotion on the first night and I was working on the devotion for the next morning. God had led me to share out of 1 Kings Chapter 19. In the passage; Elijah is discouraged and depressed to the point of wanting to just die. God strengthened him and led him to Mount Sinai. Once he arrived, God asked the prophet twice why he was there. Both times Elijah told God—from his perspective—about all the things that were going wrong in his ministry. He thought he was the only prophet left, no one was listening and others were trying to kill him.

God's first response to the discouraged prophet was simply to go out on the mountain and stand in His presence.

This is the famous passage of how God demonstrated His power for Elijah in a wind that tore rocks into pieces, an earthquake, a fire and then speaking to Elijah in a gentle whisper.

God's second response to the same proclamation

of sorrows was to tell His prophet to go back the way he'd come—with a correct perspective—God's perspective. God helped Elijah see what HE was doing. He'd prepared a helper for Elijah—Elisha. Many in Israel had listened and not bowed down to Baal. The king and queen of Israel wouldn't kill Elijah, they'd been given a chance to repent and now God was anointing replacements.

At that point nothing had physically changed—except Elijah was allowed to view his circumstances from God's perspective.

Ready to share, I was excited to see how God would apply this truth. That night, I was astonished by Mike's message. He read an excerpt out of "A Horse and His Boy" by C. S. Lewis. The passage describes when Aslan, Narnia's depiction of Jesus, reveals himself to Shasta, the main character of the book. Throughout the story Shasta had been chased by lions and viewed them as one of his greatest troubles. Because it



**For all who are weary and in need of encouragement—look back on this year and see the work that God has done in and through you. Because He’s been faithful in the past—you can trust Him wholly for your future.**

was dark when Aslan came, Shasta didn’t realize that he was a lion himself and Aslan didn’t immediately tell him.

Instead Aslan asks Shasta, “Tell me your sorrows.” Then Shasta, much like Elijah in 1 Kings 19, tells a tale of great woe. He recounts sleeping in a graveyard with only a beast to keep him company, and being chased by lions several times. Aslan tells Shasta how it was HE who had scared him, forcing him to join with a girl who ended up helping him on the journey. Then Aslan tells how He comforted Shasta in the graveyard and later scared his horse to give it the strength to reach the destination in time to save the kingdom. He also revealed how He’d pushed Shasta into a boat as a young boy so he would be found by the fisherman who raised him. Shasta finally looks into the darkness and simply asks, “Who *are* you?” Aslan answered three times: “Myself, Myself” and the third time in a low gentle whisper, “*Myself*.”

God had laid on both Mike and I the same concept. It made perfect sense that in

a room full of people who were struggling everyday to run ministries that He would direct a message of encouragement. Both examples were overwhelmed by their circumstances because they were so caught up in the negative that they couldn’t see the bigger picture. Elijah had a skewed view of his ministry and its purpose while Shasta was so mixed up he thought that Aslan was the enemy.

At that point nothing had physically changed—except both were allowed to view their circumstances from *God’s perspective*

Many times in my life I’ve been discouraged only to see years later that God was using those hard seasons for good. It didn’t feel like it at the time but

that’s often how God works. Rarely does He give us the whole picture like He did for Elijah, but often we can look back and see the good God has done in our lives up to the present.

When we look back on the good God has already done, it’s much easier to be at peace with what He’s doing now. He’s God and He doesn’t change. Since He’s shown Himself faithful in the past, why do we worry now? This is a very empowering perspective to view our present circumstances.

For all who are weary and in need of encouragement—look back on this year and see the work that God has done in and through you. Because He’s been faithful in the past—you can trust Him wholly for your future. When life is hard, seek His presence and remember what He has already done. Take heart, you can trust Him in *all* seasons of life... He is faithful.



Photos: 2015 Carissa Lynn  
Ramsdell/nikkrody.com



# AGAINST THE

# Flow

BY SARAH ROBINETT

This summer some of the Ranch crew set out on an adventure to kayak on one of Central Oregon's high mountain lakes. Enamored by the pristine mountain beauty reflecting off the water, I was in awe. I couldn't help immerse in the scenery before me, as we unloaded our gear from the truck. Exploring another mountain lake was definitely my idea of a fun time—I couldn't wait to get started!

One by one, as each kayak dipped into the water, our small group made their way toward the center of the lake. Kim was fully prepared as our leader and I was thankful for her example. We were well equipped with food, water and paddles. My mind shuddered slightly at the potential danger of tipping my kayak over in the middle of the lake. Thankfully, the thought quietly faded as I fastened my life jacket snugly around me.

With my heart at rest and a smile on my face, I was excited for the adventure ahead of us. Just as I glanced up at the mountain peaks, my kayak hit rock bottom! I looked down and realized that the center of this part of the lake was only 6 inches deep. I observed many of my friends climb out of their kayaks. While splashing through the shallow water, they pulled their boats behind them. I laughed as my apprehension of deep, fish-filled mountain water evaporated within the realization that we were currently exploring a giant wilderness kiddy pool.

Kim pressed on and spoke above the splashing, "I know there's a creek somewhere through here, we just have to find it. It's really fun to paddle and explore upstream!" While following her, we sometimes hiked with kayaks in tow. Other times, we sat in our boats and dug our fingers into the sandy lake bottom, scooting ourselves along. Mild rapids indicated the illusive creek ahead. Once Kim located it, we headed upstream against the flow of water. We were off on our adventure!

It wasn't long before we came against noticeable opposition. Often we'd get caught in strong currents that pushed us into the bushes along the bank. The bottom of my boat scrapped in sections of shallow water and made paddling difficult. Out of breath with burning muscles, I realized that adventure was a lot more work than I had imagined.

As soon as I let up my efforts to press on through the strong current, I would immediately drift backward downstream. I quickly realized that—no matter what—I had to keep paddling forward. Because the shallow rapids seemed impossible to navigate, I had to train myself to aim toward deeper water. Also, if I didn't face the oncoming flow of water straight on, it would catch

the side of the kayak, pinning me against the bank. Again, I'd be stuck in the brush, unable to paddle at all.

Soon, the creek became narrow with sharp curves. Eventually, I lost sight of the others. Although I knew my friends were near, I still felt alone. Every once in a while I'd catch a glimpse of someone up ahead. This motivated me to press on. Occasionally, I'd look back and see a friend struggling behind me. Knowing what it was like to lag behind, I cheered them on to keep fighting forward.

We finally reached our destination upstream and stopped to have lunch. As I caught my breath, parallels flowed through my mind of what God was showing me about ministry.

Sometimes ministry can be like fighting a strong current of challenge. I have to face what tests me straight on with Scripture. Without it, I can easily be thrown against the bank—caught in the bushes. I need to know how to use the leverage God's given me through His Spirit, always aiming for the deeper things of Him.

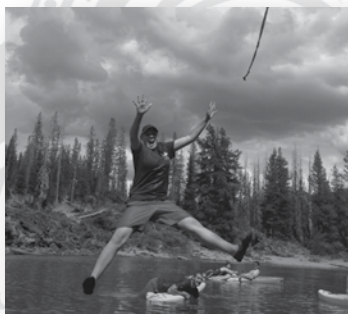
It's so important to have those who've gone ahead to inspire us to keep going. We in turn, cheer on those behind us. We can feel like we're alone, but the truth is we're not. Jesus is always with us. And no matter what your perspective is, sometimes ministry is just HARD WORK. James 1:2-3, "Dear brothers and sisters, when trouble comes your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow." (NLT)

After lunch—and an epic cherry pit-spitting contest—we climbed into our little vessels and headed back downstream. What a fun ride! Apart from casually directing ourselves, we effortlessly coasted along. Carried by the current, I wondered if this was a picture of doing ministry while resting in the power of God. I also considered how complacency allows us to drift farther away from the Lord's best plan.

To me, it's an example of both! The Lord spoke to my Spirit: "Child, just as there are varying degrees of battle in a war, there are also varying degrees—or seasons—within all ministries. Sometimes resting is vital but when it's out of My season, it's deadly. Staying close to Me can only happen by knowing My Word and through prayer. You will know the time to battle and the time to rest by having your eyes on Me as your Commander and trusting Me to guide you into all truth."

Whichever season we find ourselves in, God is with us and helps us finish the journey. Jesus WILL complete the adventure He's calling each one of us to fulfill.

In reflection, I'm thankful for the burning in my muscles when paddling against the flow, because it's burned a deeper lesson into my heart.



# Gratitude

BY TROY & KIM MEEDER

For our dear family, we thank you for all you've given to Crystal Peaks. Your financial gifts, words of encouragement, friendship and prayers have been the loving mortar that holds this simple place together. Without your faithful support there would be no means to "Rescue the equine, Mentor the child, offer Hope for the family or Empower new ministries." Without your continuing kindness, it's likely that Crystal Peaks would still be an old abandoned cinder mine, capable of producing nothing.

Now, after TWO DECADES of walking this journey together, the Lord has breathed on your combined gifts to us... and in HIS 'loaves and fishes way'... everything has changed.

The 8.9-acre ranch that existed for 17 years in a basin of pure rock, now has been expanded into 100 acres that include rich farmland, homes, barns, shops, pastures, sustaining gardens and a hay field.

Over the last twenty years, we've been blessed to be involved in the lives of tens of thousands who have walked up our gravel drive. We've had the sweet privilege of watching many grow into adulthood, who are now bringing *their* children to experience what continues to be so special to them.

We are so incredibly grateful that you've loved us enough to commit—not only to the sprint—but the marathon of ministry. Thank you for shouldering with us in such a tangible way, each helping to pour the hope of our Lord back into the broken hearted.

Thank you friends for being the "beautiful feet" that have helped us bring the Good News to those who've frequented the ranch for the past twenty years. Your combined gifts of love have converged in this place, lifting all toward freedom in Jesus.

Within this blessed season, it's our desire that His very presence be your greatest gift.

*Merry Christmas to you, our extended family. May the love, hope and peace of Jesus be yours today, tomorrow and every day of the year to come.*

With profound gratitude and love,

*Troy and 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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# CPYR 2016 CALENDAR

**Our 2016 CPYR Calendar is now available! Order now to receive our colorful calendar filled with some of our favorite pictures and inspiring Scriptures.**

To order online, click "Ranch Life" on the homepage of our website, [www.crystalpeaksyouthranch.org](http://www.crystalpeaksyouthranch.org). Or, you can mail in your request to: 19344 Innes Market Road, Bend, OR 97703.

We will have the calendars available to ship out the first part of December. The calendars are not for sale, they are our gift to you.

For those of who would like to make a donation to help offset the cost of the production and shipping, donations of \$7 can be made to our website or by mail. Please designate that your donation is for the 2015 Calendar. To help cover increased shipping costs, all international orders outside of the US and Canada will be required to pay a \$5 shipping fee.

**Merry Christmas and a very Happy New Year  
from your Crystal Peaks family!**

*Disclaimer: We cannot guarantee that you will receive your calendar before Christmas.*

