

HOPE FOR THE FAMILY

AROUND the FIRE

NEWS FROM CRYSTAL PEAKS YOUTH RANCH SPRING 2011

SECOND CHANCES

BY KATHERINE TEAGUE

Her lower lip stuck out as her upper lip pushed it into a downward curve. With great drama Paige lifted her arm and pointed her index finger toward the expression on her face. By doing so, she firmly told me she wasn't ready to get off her horse. "Okay, let's go one more time around and then we'll go feed Buckshot the peach you brought him." Instantly, her expression transformed into a contagious smile as she let out a squeal of delight.

I watched as my assistant, Sarah, led Buckshot and his new buddy around the arena one last time. Paige sat very balanced atop our small Appaloosa, wearing a bright pink shirt, jeans, and brown cowgirl boots. As the little team approached the mounting block steps to dismount, again the upset frown returned. The fingertips of Paige's two hands met together continuously as she signed and spoke, "More... more..."

"Paige, I think Buckshot needs that peach now." She made one final signing protest for more.

"I know you love riding Buckshot, and he loves you too." I couldn't help but smile as I spoke to her, "Remember, you can ride tomorrow after *wakie wakies*."

"Wakie, Wakies!" she exclaimed with a growing smile.

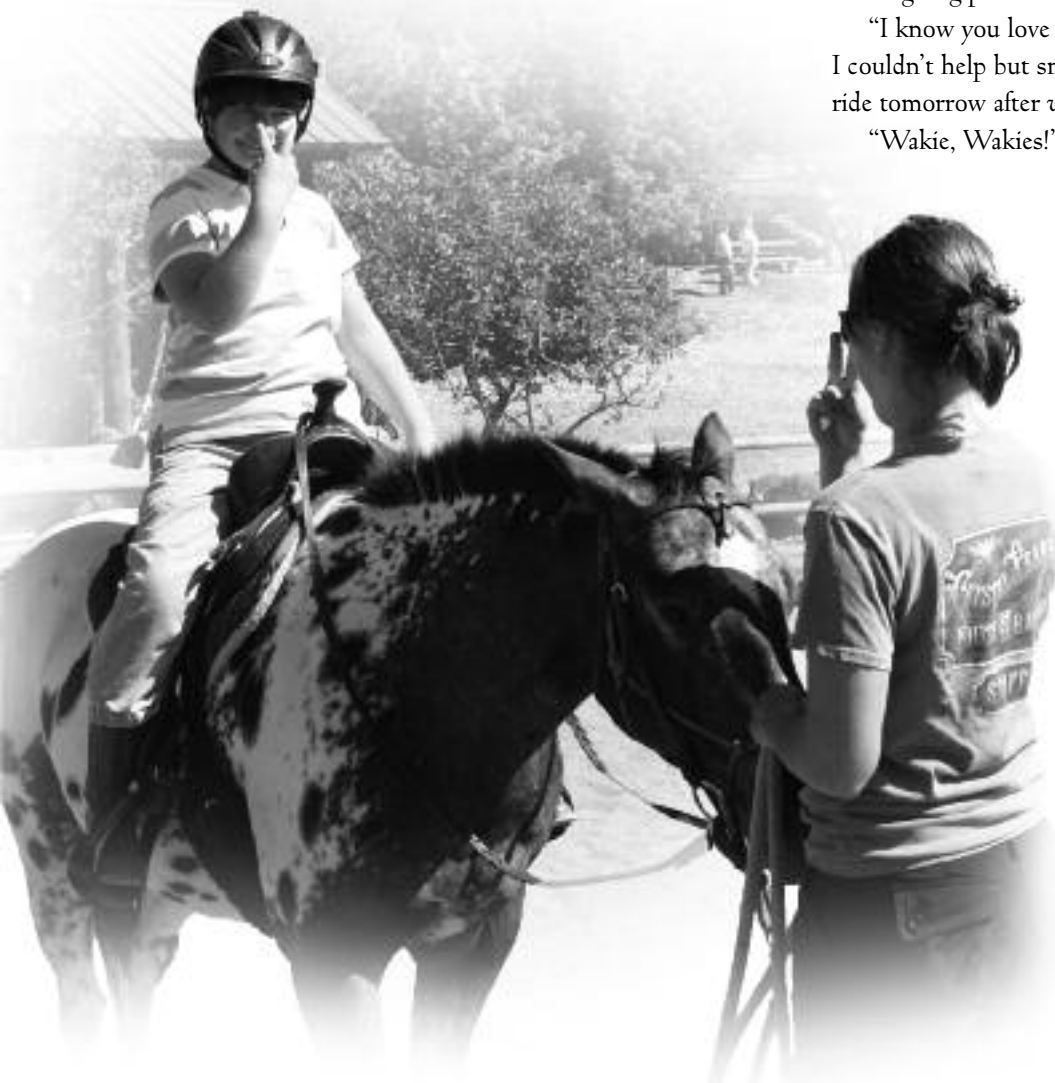
Learning to speak her language, I said again with great enthusiasm, "Wakie wakies!"

Earlier she had laughed and laughed at this expression. Paige deliberated for a moment, then reached for my outstretched hands and swung her leg onto the steps.

"Good job, Paige!" I encouraged. By playing a mirroring game, she followed me down the stairs. For the final step onto the sandy arena floor she said, "Bunny hop," and with her feet together, jumped down.

Walking Buckshot out of the arena, I didn't know who was more excited about our next session, Paige or me. This girl was phenomenal. I was so engaged by her and we'd laughed so hard that our time together seemed over too soon. Because of her, my heart was left full of childlike joy.

Continued on page 2



Getting to know Paige and her story was a great gift—one too good to keep to myself.

Eighteen years earlier, life looked extremely different for Paige. Born near Christmastime, her first day of life almost became her last. The umbilical cord had wrapped around her neck three times, nearly strangling her to death. This complication caused Paige to have a stroke. Further damage was inflicted by her birth mother's long-term abuse of alcohol and drugs. Unable to keep her critically ill child, Paige's mom immediately put her up for adoption.

Paige was placed into her new adoptive family early in January. Her dire health required that she spend two more months in the neonatal unit with a needle in her head, tubes in her nose, and electronics monitoring her vital signs. The full extent of her ominous condition was still unknown to her new parents. But, as they

spent time with her, they began to witness something remarkable. In the midst of her struggle, this infant appeared to intuitively understand who needed encouragement. Soon it was known throughout the hospital that Paige actually *smiled* at people.

Life for Paige and her parents was not easy. It didn't take long before she was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, and Mental Retardation. Before her eighth birthday, she'd been in the hospital more than 40 times, often near the brink of death.

Doctors informed her parents that *if* she survived... she would *never* walk or talk.

Thankfully, Paige believed otherwise and surmounted all odds. I witnessed her do *far* more than walk and talk. Her mind was sharp and her sense of humor keen. Paige rode a horse, played, laughed and joked.

My next session with Paige was the following day and I was excited about our time together. When I saw her, she embraced me in the tightest, warmest bear hug I've ever experienced. "Paige, not too hard," her Mom gently coached.

Smiling, I looked directly into Paige's eyes and asked, "Are you ready to ride a horse today?"

Her expression suddenly brightened. "Ride a horse... Buckshot," was her simple answer. "Buckshot it is,"

I said as we walked to the tack room to retrieve a halter.

Soon, we were in the arena. I looked up at Paige as she sat on her favorite horse. She wore an expression of complete jest on her face. "Look!" Paige pointed toward the mountains. I

turned around and heard instant, animated laughter



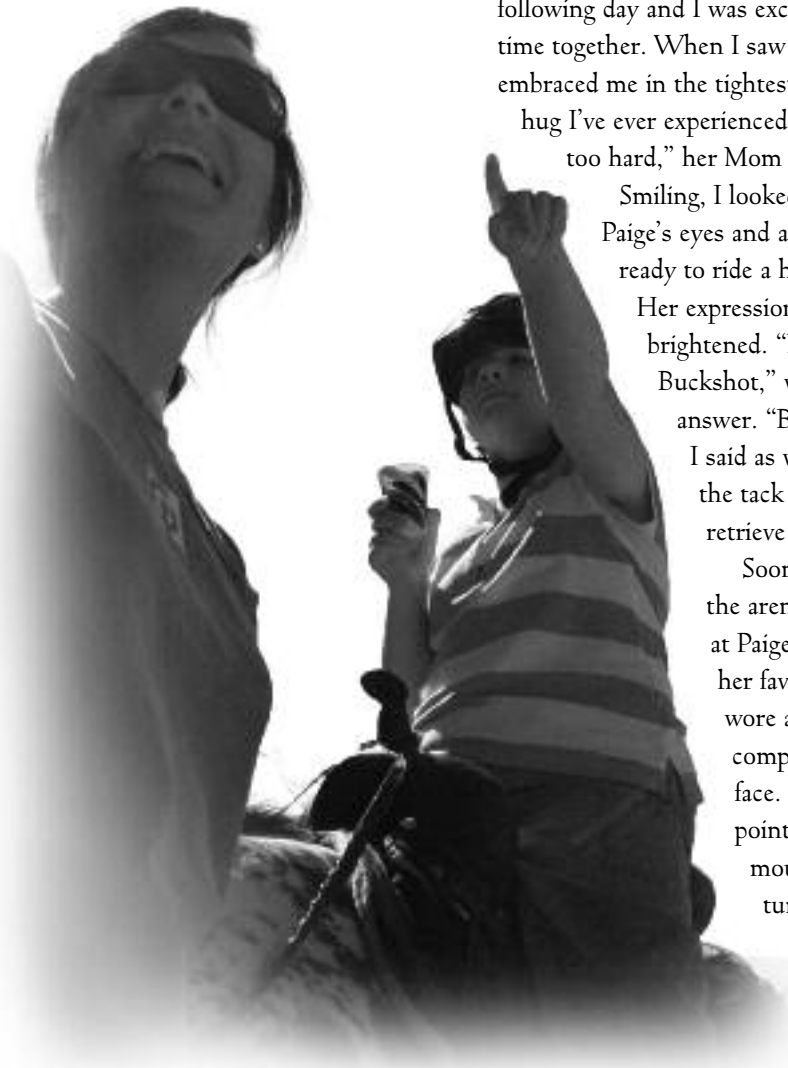
burst out behind me from the girl on top of Buckshot. Finally, she said between giggles, "I tricked you!" Chuckling, I agreed, "You DID trick me." I couldn't believe how easily I'd fallen for her joke. "Paige, you're too silly. You like to be a prankster, don't you?" With a huge smile spreading across her face, she nodded.

Paige signaled from Buckshot's back that she wanted to do the "secret handshake" she'd taught me. We laughed again as she helped me remember the sequence of movements. This seemed to seal our special time together.

There's something about Paige that is unique, beautiful. Reflecting on our time together, I realized this quality can only be Jesus working in and through her. Paige may not be perfect by the world's standards, but she's greatly valued by the God of all Creation. She's chosen to believe this truth, confirming it with her own keenly spoken words, "Jesus lives in my heart."

Jesus came to restore all that has been ravaged and broken by sin on this earth, including you and me. He takes the imperfect and remakes it into something remarkable. This grace is what's transforming Paige's life; and God is using her, giving her a personality and gifts to reflect His saving love to others.

Paige's faith is distinctive and pure, and it manifests in her everyday interactions. For me, it's a compelling reminder that it takes nothing more than simple belief in Christ to impact the world.



QUITE SIMPLE

BY RACHEL HANSON-MCBRIDE

This time of year, the office is abuzz with ideas and creative ways to refine our program for the upcoming season. We do this to discover the most effective way to fill our small role in the transformational work the Lord is already doing in the lives of those whom He brings across our path.

During this period of refining, it is so easy to focus on our program's design, staff training, etc, as the way to improve our efficacy. Yet, experience tells me, filling the role Christ has for us is actually quite simple. We could try to make it seem more intricate, complicated and difficult, but honestly there really isn't much to it.

This fact was proven to me once again as the ranch session program came to a close last November. For a handful of seasons now, we have requested feedback from the parents of the families who utilize the ranch. The survey helps us form and fashion the following year's programming, which enables us to better serve our kids.

As the 2010 survey responses came in, they proved without question that the most influential part of our ministry is also the *most basic*. Volunteers and staff who simply loved kids and showed genuine interest in their lives was once again reported as the part of our ministry with greatest impact, far more so than any class, teaching or other program. What a sweet reminder that with all the things we can do, we are most effective when we keep it simple and simply share the love of Christ.

Days, months and years of inaction or striving can go by as we try to equip ourselves with the tools we *think* we need to serve the Lord. The truth is—if we have Christ—we have everything we need and are ready today. Though He may bring opportunities for us to learn, change, and grow... we cannot let that process distract us from the work at hand. The day that we humbly fill this role of simplicity—is the same day the world around us will change.



Special Girl

BY KIM MEEDER

*J*enni Reiling was my dear friend.

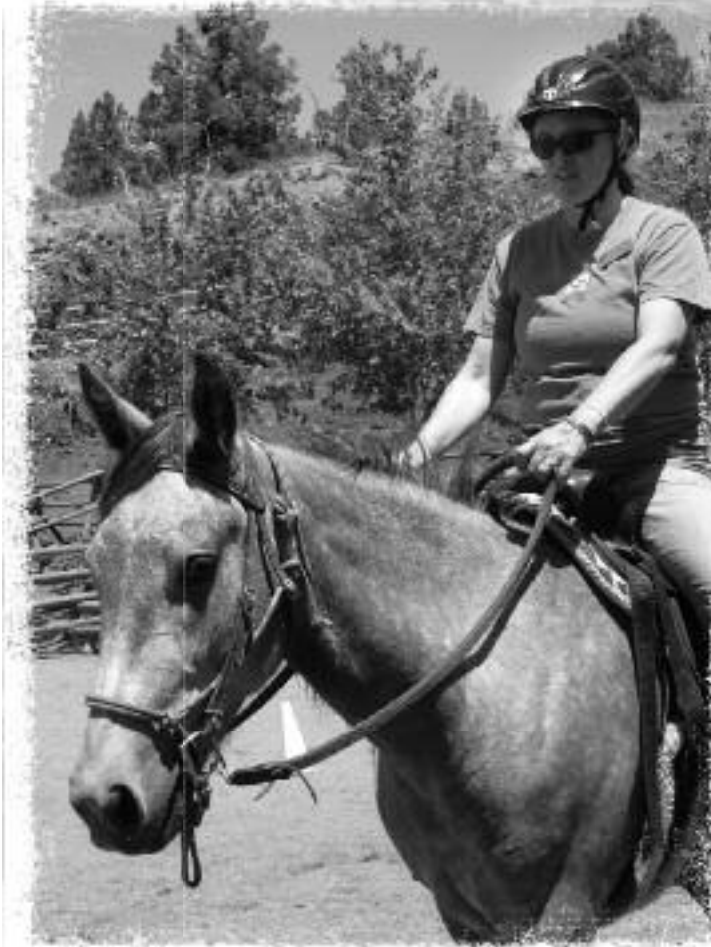
In learning to 'fight the good fight,' no one on this earth has taught me more about what it looks like to swing a sword of joy than Jenni.

She was hired by the ranch to assist Troy and I with incoming communications concerning public media. This included organizing all television, radio, magazine and internet interviews, plus coordinating speaking events.

Jenni was also my travel assistant. In doing so, she became the keeper of my schedule, the thinking half of my brain, my sword bearer and my "Jonathan." In this unique roll, we traveled side-by-side for three years. Often, at the end of an event we'd stumble through the doorway of our hotel room, drop our gear and each flop down onto our own beds. And then... the laughter would start!

Perhaps fanned by the relief of completion or exhaustion, on many occasions we would laugh deep into the night. Without exception, almost everything is funny at one in the morning! When I would threaten to turn out the light, she would toss her wig at my head and then the "bald" jokes would start.

While most women complain about their *bad* hair days, she would cut up over her NO HAIR days! While publically battling at my side to help share the truth of Christ, few knew she was also privately battling cancer.



Neither her chemo treatments nor the one hundred and fifty miles that separated our homes was enough to keep her from blitzing over the mountains to visit as often as she could. She loved to hug the ranch staff, both the two and four legged kind. Yet, of them all, she especially loved a young filly named Hanalei.

Jenni and I rode side-by-side in the wilderness every chance we had. No ride was truly complete without a laughing

gallop through the trees. As her cancer progressed, Jenni was reduced to riding Hanalei only in the arena, then only at a walk, and eventually not at all. But she still took the time to hug and kiss her special girl.

On August 17th, 2010, Jenni walked down the ranch driveway, never to return. She knew it and I knew it. Although she never complained, she would often tell me, "Kim, one of the hardest parts about my cancer is knowing that I will *never* see the ranch again, hug the staff... or kiss my special girl."

Now, as she was confined to a bed, it was my turn to bolt over the mountains as often as possible. I made it my personal mission to bring as much of the ranch to Jenni as I could. Every trip I brought her gifts of cards, flowers from the staff, emails, videos and pictures of Hanalei. She appreciated every gesture and always ended our times together by saying something like, "Please tell the staff that I love them and am praying for them and give my special girl a kiss for me."

One day while driving back home after a visit with Jenni, an idea crossed my mind... *a brilliant idea*. Although I knew I would not be the one to carry it out, I knew who could! After sharing my stroke of genius with the staff, knowing grins spread across their faces like a united team of Cheshire cats.

On a day in mid-October, while Troy and I were traveling, nearly the entire Crystal Peaks staff loaded into our ranch trucks and drove over the mountains to visit their ailing teammate. Confined to a hospital bed set up in her living room, Jenni was thrilled beyond words to once again embrace the staff in person.

After hugs all around and lively conversation, Jenni's fellow coworkers



somberly told her that there was still one more soul who *desperately* needed a hug and kiss from her. Then, without explanation, they swung open the front door of her home and led Hanalei—a 1200 pound horse—right into her living room! Jenni squealed and leapt out of bed. “My girl! My girl! You brought my girl!... into my living room!”

Because of the joy Jenni poured into her coworkers’ lives, when she needed it the most—they returned the favor. Jenni was able to hug and kiss her special girl one more time.

Joy begets joy. Like sharing chocolate on a hot day, you just can’t help wearing some yourself. Jenni taught me that.

Even when her cancer had progressed

everyone who works in the cancer ward... than a cancer patient! Why shouldn’t it be me?!” And, “If my cancer is how others will know the hope, peace and joy of Jesus is real... then that’s a *life well lived.*”

As brutal as her cancer became, she never surrendered to self-pity or allowed her joy to be diminished in any way.

Even when her body was failing, she still wanted to pray with me. I quickly learned this actually meant praying *for me.* With my head laid softly on her bed and my arms over her legs, one hand holding her feet and the other cupping her hand,



to the point of needing hospice care, she would say, “Having cancer isn’t what I would’ve chosen, but knowing that somehow, this is God’s perfect plan helps me have deep, abiding peace. Besides, who better to bring the hope of Jesus to

I would listen to my dying friend, my “Jonathan” pray... *for me.*

Nothing in this life could steal the joy Jenni found in Jesus... not even death.

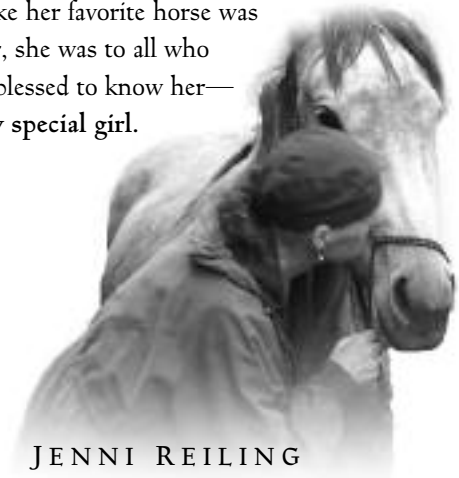
During my last visit with Jenni in which she could still speak, she made it

clear that she wanted me to share this message—there is ALWAYS joy. No one can make us a prisoner of sorrow... but us. When Jesus Christ came to this earth, lived a perfect life, laid that life down in our place and rose again, He broke the lock on the prison door of suffering. And that door can never be closed again! It’s a fact that we will all spend time in the dungeon of hardship and when we do, there’s no better time than that moment to know the door is OPEN. All we need to do is reach for the hand of Jesus and step out into the freedom, the hope and the joy that has already been purchased for us.

On this day, each of us has a decision to make. Will we *choose* to embrace the hope, love and joy Jesus freely offers us? Will we choose to reach for the hand that has always been reaching for us?

Jenni’s final prayer for you was that today... would be that day.

Like her favorite horse was to her, she was to all who were blessed to know her—a very special girl.



JENNI REILING
June 26th 1962 – January 2nd 2011

THE DREAM

BY TROY MEEDER

Within the darkness of night, I slipped into the place of dreams. A recurring picture crept into my mind. It's the dream again.

Memories of my youth flash like the flickering scenes from an old movie projector. I see my mom driving my younger brother and I to school, we're all laughing as she pushes our old Ford past its tired limit to race through the fallen oak leaves. Cheering her on, we spin around and watch the tumbling plume again start their dance back down to the ground.

Ushered in by autumn, anticipation rises in my chest. School is starting. I'm excited by the promise of what's to come. The warmth of my memory fades, as a new one takes its place. This is not home, this is not our little town and this is not the beginning of a childhood adventure.

This place is unfriendly, lifeless, different.

It's cold here. The afternoon wind blows with an icy breath across a grassy field before me. Trees shed their fall glory. A bleak gray sky has swallowed the beauty of leaves somersaulting to the ground.

Slowly, I find myself on the concrete steps of my college. I sense a great passage of time. Wrinkled, weathered hands signify I'm older, much older, and gone are the days of my youth. Years have passed since I walked these scholarly halls. *Why am I here again?* The faces that pass me are not those I recognize. They're all kids, full of assurance, rich with the expectation of life to come. Future doctors, lawyers, pilots and chemists walk around me. They will embrace the halls of learning and leave this place with the satisfaction of completing the task.

They remind me I've yet to finish what I've started. Like a heavy stone within my heart, I feel the weight of being a failure. Much of my life has been wasted. My hopes and dreams blow away like the leaves. I wanted to be something special. But, I'm not.

I have been and forever will be just... average.

Remorse and regret slither into my heart and laugh at me. With every jeer they remind me that I'm old, used up, purposeless. My life has been a waste. Like an icy river, worthlessness floods my soul.

Days turn into years. I've done little more than go to work, pay bills, eat, sleep... nothing. The scorecard of my life feels like a zero. Exhausted with regret, the same driving questions pierce my mind: how did my life end up here? What led me to become nothing more than average?

Slowly, warmth comes... light... my senses are filled with the familiar smell of coffee brewing on the stove. Opening my eyes, I see the early morning sun pouring in around me. We're in our camper. My wife, Kim, looks at me and grins. Holding up a coffee mug, she silently asks me if I want a cup. Wiping the sleep from my eyes, I realize we're camping beneath the granite peaks of the North Cascade wilderness.

It was all just a dream, *the* dream.

This recurring taunt inspired me to write the book *Average Joe*. For nearly thirty years, I was haunted by the idea that my life as an average man was somehow missing the mark and meaningless. I felt that I'd fallen short by not having a title, scholastic accomplishments or monetary success.

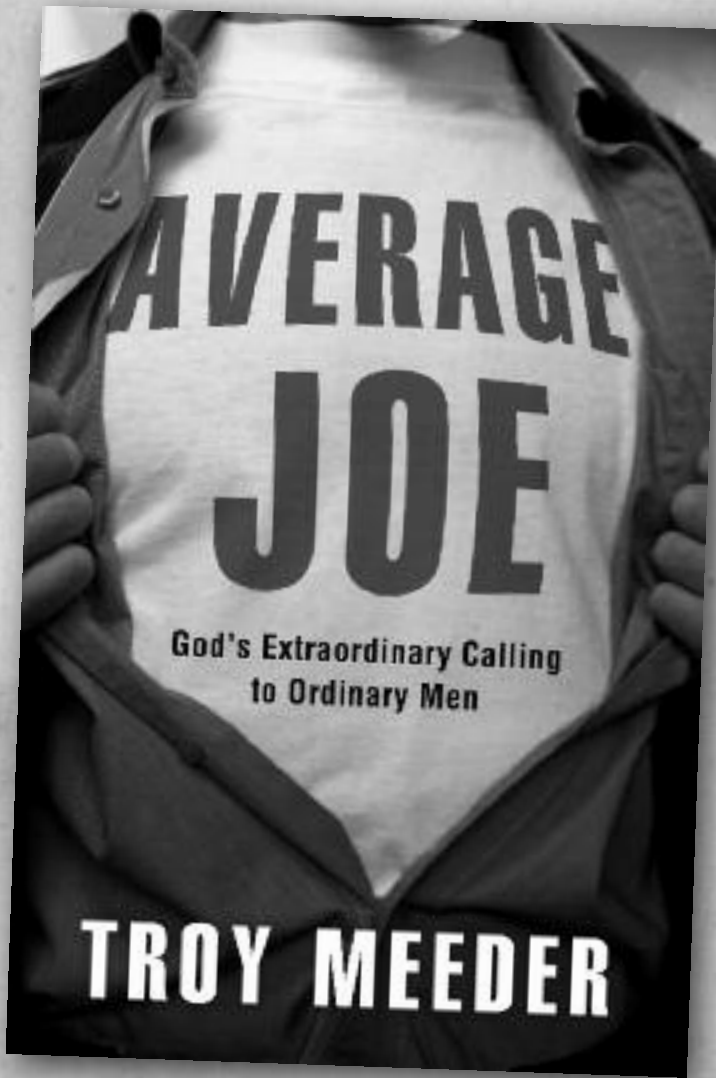
Since, I've come to release how I feel and stand on what is true... God loves average joes. His Word repeatedly proves it. Throughout the Bible, God uses simple men to change the world for His glory—a shepherd, a father, a fisherman, a boy, and a dozen ordinary guys were chosen to carry His hope into the next generation.



Average Joe was not written to encourage and challenge men simply toward a deeper purpose in this life... but the deepest purpose... to *know* God. It chronicles the lives of typical guys who have changed the world around them by their simple faith in Christ. Perhaps overlooked by our culture's standards, men like these fathers, soldiers, gardeners and cowboys are the best of us. By reflecting what it looks like to be steadfast, honorable, faithful, humble, selfless... they mirror what all men should look like... Jesus.

"This book is dynamite! If you are an average Joe, Troy will biblically blow up the lie that your existence and your life are not significant. And if you think you're not an average Joe, then you have an even deeper problem! Either way this book is strong medicine that counters diseased thinking. The best men's book I've read in a long time."

— STEVE FARRAR, speaker and author of *Point Man*



Average Joe can be preordered online through most major booksellers such as Amazon, Barnes and Nobles, Borders, Goodreads.com and christianbook.com. The release date is April 5th.

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

Please use my donation for:

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TACKAHOLIC?



1—If you can't open your tack room door because of the saddles stacked behind it... you might be a tackaholic.

2—If you have 45 halters and only 2 horses... you might be a tackaholic.

3—If you have a box of tack that you 'might use someday' and you haven't opened it in 9 years... you might be a tackaholic.

4—If you still have tack from your 4-H days, and you're now a grandparent... you might be a tackaholic.

5—If you have tack that is so dusty, you can no longer tell what it is... you might be a tackaholic.

6—If you have 5 saddles but still only have one backside... you might be a tackaholic.

Friend, if any of these statements describe you, don't despair any longer. There IS hope for you and your tackaholism. Instated by popular demand, CPYR now offers Tackaholic Freedom!

Our four-step program is simple: CLEAN, LOOK, CONTACT, SEND.

Step 1—CLEAN OUT YOUR TACK ROOM!

Step 2—LOOK on our website under 'Similar Ministries' and click on your state to see which ministry is closest to you.

Step 3—CONTACT them to determine if they need your tack. If so, send your gift of tack directly to your new friends. If this seems like too many steps...

Step 4—SEND your tack to us and we will be happy to find an enthusiastic home for your gift.

The ministry and reach of CPYR is growing. Currently, we've helped to establish almost 200 ranches similar to ours who are serving children with horses for Christ. Forty-four of these new ministries have requested our assistance in helping them acquire more tack for their growing programs. Because of the rising need, every tack item is welcome.

If you're a tackaholic... please help us—help them—help YOU—find freedom, gratification and perhaps a new friend through our four-step program!