

AROUND the FIRE

NEWS FROM CRYSTAL PEAKS YOUTH RANCH

SUMMER 2011



A Girl and a Horse

BY KIM MEEDER

I watched as each curry-comb stroke produced a perfect halo of red horse hair. Like giant dandelion spores they drifted in the cold spring breeze across the ranch. The quiet respite

gave me time to ponder the arrival of this new horse...

I met Kim Vogler Denigan in the fall of 2003. She had just read *Hope Rising* and was the first person to contact me directly about her reaction to the simple message. Over the phone her story poured out. She lived in Pueblo, Colorado, was newly married and deeply moved by the book. Like me, God had chosen a horse to enrich her life, quickly becoming her confidant, mentor and friend.

The following spring, I had the privilege of meeting Kim and her husband, Dale, face to face. Troy and I had been invited to Colorado Springs to tape our first interview with Dr. James Dobson. The evening before our interview, the Denigans journeyed up from Pueblo to meet us for dinner. Throughout the meal, I was struck by the many similarities between us. Kim was tall with dark hair. She had a direct gaze and spoke the truth with an easy smile. It was clear she was deeply in love with the hard working man at her side, and it was equally obvious how much he adored her.

In the years that followed, the Denigans became faithful supporters of Crystal Peaks. One summer during a family vacation to the Northwest, Kim and Dale surprised us by turning their old truck

up the ranch driveway for a visit. We were thrilled to show them what their contributions had helped to create. No matter how much time had passed, every interaction we had with our friends from Colorado was a unique gift.

Because of this truth, when the news of Kim's cancer reached us, it was a difficult blow. After three years of battling her illness, Kim's husband called the ranch. In a voice hoarse with grief, he told me that the time had come for his beloved wife to say goodbye to all that she loved. Kim didn't have any children, but she'd owned a horse since its birth. The fifteen-year-old bay mare was like a beloved daughter to her. Dale spoke the request of his dying wife to me, "She was like you Kim, just a girl and a horse. Now she is hoping you will take care of her precious friend."

Through my own tears, I asked Dale if I could speak with his wife. Her voice was so diminished that I no longer recognized it. Weak with illness and emotion, Kim strained to form the words, "Will you please take care of my girl?"

Will you allow all the love I've poured into her to fill a child's heart? I know this is what she was created to do. Oh Kim, *this is so hard*. Before I can say goodbye, I need to know that she will be safe and loved. Will you please give her a home?"

During that phone call, many tears fell in Colorado and in Oregon. Yet, behind the words of my friend, I could hear the truth of 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, "*All praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the source of every mercy and the God who comforts us. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When others are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.*"



Continued on page 2

"No, I will not abandon you as orphans, I will come to you."

— John 14:18

My prayer was simple, "Lord, You're the only One who can make this happen. You're the only One who can make the dying request of my friend come to pass."

The following week, two of our horses just happened to be placed in remarkable homes through a chorus of events that could only be orchestrated by God. This meant that we had space available to receive Kim's bay mare and her husband's black gelding. Many people united in a swift effort to move the Denigan horses to Central Oregon. On April second, two new equine residents made their way up the hill and into the arms of the Crystal Peaks family.

On April ninth, a dark haired woman named Kim, made her way up into the arms of Jesus and into the hearts of her eternal family.



To honor the life and love of Kim Denigan, we've renamed her beautiful mare "Deni." And because we first met them face to face through an interview with Dr. Dobson, we've renamed Dale's black gelding "Doc."

A few days later, I brought Deni out for some ground training and a gentle ride. While grooming the mare's neck and shoulder, Sarah, one of my staff wandered over. She mentioned some photographs she'd taken of Deni and wanted to send on to the Denigans. I turned toward her and quietly shared that Kim had already passed away. I thanked Sarah for her thoughtfulness, hugged her and turned back toward the horse tied in front of me.

Deni's response was profound.

A mare I barely knew, suddenly turned her neck until her forehead pressed against my chest. I heard her release a breath that was lower than a groan. As if to cradle a child, I held her head in my arms and silently rocked her.

Only the Lord knows whether she was responding to my sorrow, or somehow understood her beloved friend had died. Either way, the only mother she'd ever known was gone. Now she was a horse... without her girl.

A week later I was turning my truck up the ranch driveway when I saw something

remarkable, something redeeming, something astounding. Marina, a sixteen-year-old girl, had walked to the very bottom of the corral. She'd done this for only one reason—to spend time with Deni.

On a horse ranch designed to serve kids, this might not seem too surprising. Yet, what I saw inspired me to park my truck and climb over the fence.



God is in control, especially when things seem out of control. He is the only One who can bring beauty and purpose out of our pain.



Only a year ago, Marina's young father died of cancer. The only dad she'd ever known was gone. Now she was a girl without a father. I pulled my camera out of my pocket and snapped a few pictures of a grieving girl without a dad choosing to love and comfort a grieving horse without a mom.

Watching them together, I couldn't help but wonder if this was part of God's answer to both of their hurting hearts. By living through paralleled circumstances, each understood the other. I watched as a young woman shouldered with a hurting horse, encouraging the mare to move forward through her sorrow.

A few days later Marina shared a few of her thoughts with me. She said, "Good things can happen from bad situations. God and Jesus are the Ones that help us get through these hard times. We cannot walk through life without God because without Him, we have no hope. I believe that God has put Deni in my life for a reason. Maybe that reason will be to help me grow closer to the Lord, and to have someone who knows how I feel. I'm not really sure of the reason yet... but I'm excited to find out!"

Perhaps now they'll enter into that life changing relationship of simply becoming... "A girl and a horse."



The Letter

Crystal Peaks was founded in part as an equine rehabilitation facility and has been involved in the rescue of more than 300 horses. From the beginning children have rallied with the staff to create a devoted team of support for weak and often battered equine. Together, encircled by the loving embrace of a leader; the wounded hearts of both child and horse, have found healing.

This loving bond has reached far beyond our borders. Through our horse sponsorship program, caring souls from all over the world have joined in this tight embrace around our “angels in horsehair.” Recently, we received word from a woman who desired to start sponsoring one of our faithful equine counselors. In her letter she’d explained how years of economic hardship had cost her a great deal, including the ownership of her personal horses. Yet, through her loss had come an even greater gain.

This is an excerpt from her letter.



I miss a great deal about the days of plenty when there was more than enough, but also realize that I relied more on my money than my God in many instances. I miss my horses so much, but most especially the one who opened ‘my gate’ to God. Oddly, his name was Chipmunk. He was 17.3 with lots of muscle and bone, but all thoroughbred, and in spite of his large frame, was graceful due to his excellent conformation. His registered name was Clavicello because he was born at Monticello, but due to his personality he became known as Chipmunk. When they needed a horse for Prince Charles of England to ride in a Virginia fox hunt, they asked me to loan Chipmunk to him, which I did, so this horse was fit for royalty. He had a heart as big as his huge body. I love this horse with all my soul.

When I got the call from the stable that he had a ruptured bowel it was one of the worst days of my life. I cried out to God in a way that I have never cried before. The surgeons told me that Chipmunk could not be saved. They had to remove a good deal of intestine as well as repair the bowel as best they could and the damage was so extensive the best surgeons in the East felt it was hopeless and asked my permission to put him down. I declined permission as a voice from God came from my heart. Not only did God miraculously heal this horse, he came through it as though he only had a tooth extraction. They cut him from his groin to his breast bone and there was no hernia but just a hint of a scar that could only be seen if you were to lay down under him and look very hard for it. His coat never

lost its sheen and he dropped very little weight. Chipmunk was totally trusting of the vets; they never gave him anesthesia to remove the stitches and did not even restrain him, Chipmunk just stood there in obvious pain and complete trust.

It was through this walk with Chipmunk and God that I came to have a deeper more meaningful walk with God as I could see and feel Him at work in me as well as in my horse during this traumatic time. I know that at your ranch many disadvantaged people are healed through horses. In my case, I had everything a person could want and more, except that deep ‘one foot in front of the other’ walk with God that defines our every choice and action. I am not as financially well off as I once was, in fact times are quite challenging, but I have more than I have ever had because my hand is in the hand of God. I tell you this because so many people think that if only they had more money, or loving parents, a happy childhood, a good job, a good husband or a wife, more advantages and opportunity that life would be good and worth living. Please let them know from a person who has had all those things— and more—that life is hollow without receiving the living God as your Savior and your best friend... God had a bigger plan for Chipmunk than to sport royalty; it was to take a pampered woman who knew God but did not fully embrace Him out of a dark valley, that was not even perceived as such, and onto the high ground of real life where God lives and breathes and has His being in us.”

Horses teach us so much about the Lord’s heart. Like “Chipmunk,” may you be encouraged to step forward and share your own story of God’s saving grace. By doing so, you just might lead others to the rich “high ground” where a peaceful, abundant life in His presence can flourish through any hardship.

Moving FORWARD *in His Peace*

BY KATHERINE TEAGUE

I knew Isaac had a past.

Before coming to the Ranch, this gelding had been in a terrible trailer loading accident. The wreckage left him in a bloody trauma that nearly took his life. Though Isaac recovered from his physical wounds, his past left him emotionally scarred. He associated his pain with humans and avoided them. Often he panicked when put in situations that were unknown.

I started to work with Isaac in November. Though he'd made much progress at Crystal Peaks, he was still a tense and anxious horse. Big, sweeping motions, unrecognized objects and loud, unexpected sounds often sent him into flight. He could hardly stand still the first time I swung into the saddle. The position of his ears and the look in his eyes told me of his fear.

Honestly, my demeanor the first time I rode him was much the same. Thoughts like, "What will this horse do? Will he scatter? Will I fall?" shot through my mind. I'm sure my own eyes had the same look of uncertainty. In the past, riding horses with this unpredictable nature had not bothered me. Now it seemed like a huge obstacle looming in my path.

Where to go from here came down to a single decision: either I could avoid working with him and sidestep my anxiety, or I could face this fear by helping Isaac face his.

Once the staff entered our winter season, we started weekly classes with Clint Surplus, a skilled natural horsemanship instructor. During this time we also read books on the same subject. This was very timely for me. I had many questions about dealing with my own fears and Isaac's as well.

"Isaac takes all of his cues from you," was the advice that most shaped my work with him. More than I realized, he read my body language, mood, demeanor—everything—just how it was. When I was frightful working with him, he became nervous too. When I was calm, he remained more at ease. I learned just how intuitive horses really are.

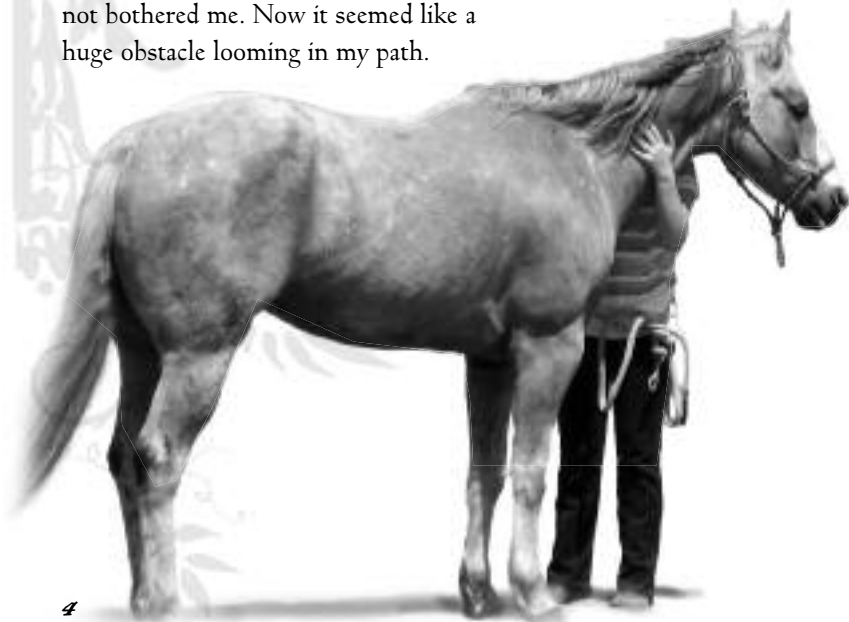
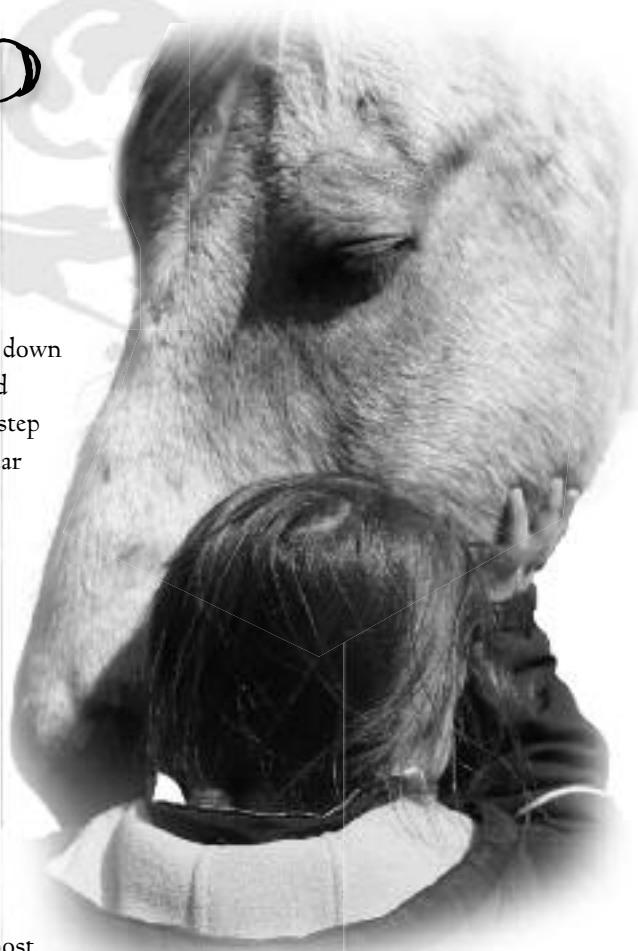
I started approaching Isaac slowly in the paddock, allowing him to make the first step toward me. I used soothing and soft motions while grooming him. Once in

the saddle, I took deep breaths to relax, and then moved into our exercises. Quickly, I realized he was a very sensitive horse that responded to gentle direction. The more we worked together the more I sensed a growing trust between us.

As with people, genuine trust is built over time.

Isaac and I had good and bad days. There were moments during our training times when I was utterly frustrated. Not because Isaac did anything wrong; I simply felt hopeless in helping him find the "right answer." At times his nerves would wreak havoc on mine. Sometimes my fear spiked and I felt my insides dissolve in a wash of rising tears. This seemed like defeat and often I would want to give up.

Isaac always mirrored my experience. One day while working in our class, we moved through, over and around obstacles at varying speeds. At first Isaac performed each exercise flawlessly. Then, while stepping over a low log, his back hooves scraped the wood as they crossed.



“Don’t worry about anything: instead pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank Him for all He has done. If you do this, you will experience God’s peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand.”

— Phil. 4:6-7

The combination of impact and sound sent Isaac lurching forward. Thankfully, I managed to stay seated; but Isaac’s calm demeanor vanished into a sudden flurry of stress.

I determined to remain composed and resolute. Together we circled around and approached the terrifying hurdle again. Upon sight, Isaac’s feet came to a halt. Slowly, I encouraged him forward with my legs. Noticing Isaac’s fear, Clint offered to escort him over using an imaginary rope. Isaac lunged ahead with nervous energy. We rode on making a large loop that led us to the log again.

With intention, we continued to face the intimidating situation. I wasn’t in a rush or trying to force anything on Isaac. Instead, my point was to let him work through his issues taking as long he needed. After several successful passes, Isaac relaxed again and willingly moved over and beyond that which he feared.

Together, Isaac and I have made great strides forward in conquering our fears. Neither of us are completely cured from holding on to our anxious thoughts, but side by side we keep working them out. Isaac now invites kids to approach him, sometimes even seeking them first.

Recently, a tender-hearted girl chose to work with Isaac during her session time. I was so proud to see that he was entirely calm and even playful as she groomed and rode him. I’m increasingly encouraged as my fledgling ability to apply training techniques with Isaac continues to flourish each time I work with him.

Isaac and I will forever be students. Our life education is teaching us to trust more deeply in our Creator, especially in the areas of our fear. Isaac is steadily realizing I only want the best for him and that my hands will never hurt him.

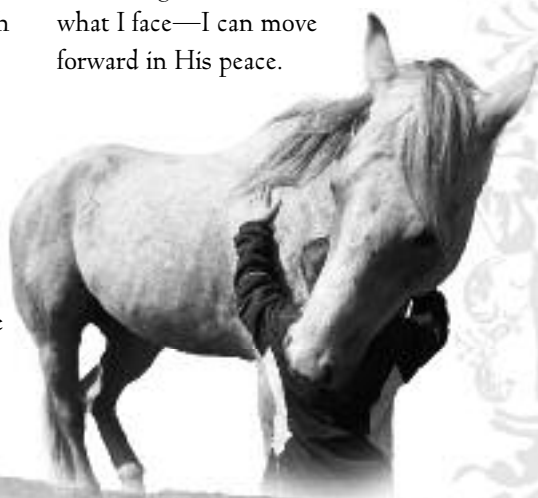
I’m steadily learning with him that in order to move through what frightens us, we must purposefully choose to step up again and again and face that which we’d rather avoid.

Freedom is found in this process. It doesn’t come in an instant, but through many consistent forward steps. In the wise words of Clint, “Finding real peace in our dread is like water wearing away stone. By constantly pouring over it, each willing step gives more room for Jesus to smooth and polish what was once rough.”

For me, “peace” cannot be found in attempting to be perfect, making others happy, or being a people pleaser. These misconceptions are foundational to most of my fears. Like Isaac, my first instinct was to hide from or avoid what scared me most. By doing so in the past, my life grew stagnant and lonely.

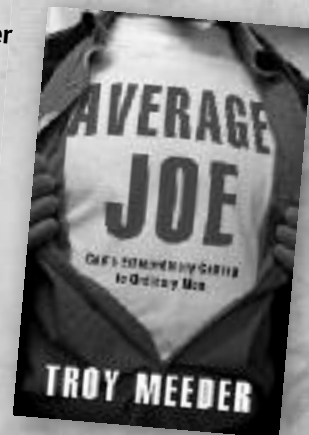
Jesus is leading me to step away from my sin and walk beyond my fear. He wants me to find the “right answer” in Him; offering me such grace and peace as His living water pours over my life. He’s promised to face my fears with me. And He’s so patient as I progress through them.

Like I’ve sought to do with Isaac, Jesus is seeking to do with me. If I look to HIM alone for guidance—no matter what I face—I can move forward in His peace.



FATHER'S DAY NEWS FLASH!

Got no clue what to buy fer yer Pa? Well, saddle up ole' Red and git yerself down to the local bookstore for a copy of *Average Joe*. (Okay, maybe you'd rather turn on the computer and order it online) Better yet, contact the ranch at averagejoe@cpyr.org and order a signed copy from Troy.



UNFORGETTABLE

BY HOLLEE KASEBERG (AGE: 13)

Just one word comes to mind when I think about March 21st, 2011: UNFORGETTABLE.

To me, unforgettable moments are those God created to make us marvel over His astonishing power and unconditional love. Someday, when we get older, memories we swore we'd never forget might start to fade. But, I just experienced a wonderful spring day that I will NEVER EVER forget for as long as I live.

I read about a breathtaking ranch outside of Tumalo, Oregon, that has filled their once unwanted abandoned cinder pit with abused, neglected and unwanted horses. They pair these horses with abused, neglected and seemingly unwanted children and teens. These horses work in the children's hearts in ways that people can't. They prove to the families that life is good. It's what you make it and you can survive anything if you have the will and desire to live.

Because this ranch is so inspirational and heart touching, I decided I'd like to get a tour set up for my thirteenth birthday. It was in March, a month before the ranch riding season opens.

I rode in a car for two hours before we finally made it to the miraculous place called Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch. I got out of the car and just stood there, wondering what kind of miracles I would get to hear about. I also wondered what kinds would happen while I was at the ranch. I figured I would hear many stories about how horses have a heartwarming grip on a child's soul. Never did I consider that I'd become part of a wonderful story. Or, how the beautiful mare now grazing in my pasture would actually be from the Ranch of Rescued Dreams.

I walked up the gravel driveway looking at all the four-legged angels with invisible wings, those we commonly call horses.

"Look Mom. There's Little Bear! And Hannah! See that bay mare with the little bit of white on her face? That's Phoenix, she was part of the largest equine rescue in Oregon history!" I was so excited that I got to see my heroes in horsehair in real life not just in pictures.

"Oh my gosh. Look at that big horse's color!" Mom said.

"His name's Bozeman, Mom. He has two blue eyes and he loves to eat cake!"

"Where's Hero?" my sister Stephanie asked.

"Umm... Oh there he is! He's in the paddock on the right side



of the driveway," I said as I pointed to him. I had a feeling this day was going to be one of those times that would leave a permanent mark on my heart and soul. It already felt like a day that made me want to come back. And it was starting to become a day that would make our eyes 'water', as my mom says in a funny attempt to hide when she is crying.

It was going to be a day that would be unforgettable.

After we met Jeff, we went to the Red Rock meeting hall to hand in our papers and watch a short DVD about the ranch. Soon, we were out meeting the horses. We started with Gideon, who'd come to the ranch to fill the gap in Sarah's heart after Shonee was put down. I related to

this because I had a Pony of America named Gidget that I had to put down too.

After we walked the ranch and saw all the horses, we met Kim. After talking to her for a little while—my whole life changed in an unexpected way. Kim asked if I had a horse. I told her that I didn't but that I was looking for one. "I think there's a bigger reason why you're here today," Kim said.

My sisters, mom and I looked at each other in complete puzzlement. Then Kim continued to share how she was looking for a new home for one of the horses. "Hannah" was overweight and needed a home where she could be fed separately to lose weight. I couldn't believe what I was hearing! I'd only joked with my mom that maybe Crystal Peaks would give me the perfect horse! I hadn't been successful in finding the right horse since I had to put Gidget down. I love this ranch so much. Stephanie and Mom just started to cry. I was so excited; all the words of thanks I wanted to say just wouldn't come out of my mouth.



Before we went back to CPYR to pick up Hannah, I had to stop at Big R, a feed store to get new tack for her. I found a dark leather headstall with silver studs, a matching breast collar, leather reins, a snaffle bit with studs and Texas stars, a bright blue halter and a black lead rope. Suddenly, on my way to the check stand, I saw Kim. My family and I went over and talked to her.

That's when she told us I was making a big difference in a woman's life just by taking Hannah home. Kim told us about a special call she got on Friday from the first couple that ever

contacted Crystal Peaks. The man told Kim that his wife was dying and all she wanted was to have Crystal Peaks accept her horse that she had raised from birth.

However, the ranch can only hold 30 horses and they were already full. But when I chose to take Hannah home, a new spot opened up just in time to take the sick woman's horse! I was so proud that I was making a difference just by bringing home my perfect dream horse. I couldn't wait to raise her for the next twenty or thirty years.

Spring break 2011 was the most memorable week of my life. I can't thank Kim enough for the amazing, life-changing gift she gave me on my thirteenth birthday. I know Hannah and I will go on many great adventures. We might win some pole bending contests and try out some western pleasure events. We have much to look forward to as I use my amazing horse to share with people about Crystal Peaks.

I've learned firsthand how the miracles that take place at the ranch are about God's unconditional love and how He shares with us all the time. I hope to volunteer at the ranch this summer. While I'm there, I plan to make some great memories, to take pictures and simply share with others how much God answers our prayers in unmistakable ways.

Life isn't a video game. You only have one chance to make great memories, learn new things, do stuff you love while you still can, and really live. Life is like a roller coaster, there's never a time when you're always on top. There are unexpected twists and turns. Although they may get difficult and challenging, by looking deep inside yourself and listening to what this ranch has to share about Jesus, you'll discover you're never alone and you can make it through anything. If you don't get stressed about every little thing and instead pray to God about everything—life will turn out better than you can imagine.



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

Please use my donation for:

- ☐ Where it is needed most
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SHEDDING SEASON

BY SARAH BECK

A content sigh escaped the precious horse standing next to us. The girl I was working with started laughing. With wind swirling in every direction, hair was dancing in the sky. Shedding season had begun.

As my young friend guided the grooming blade over our horse's coat, clumps of loosened hair clung to the circular device. Eyes full of wonder, she raised the tool to give me a better look at her predicament. The blades were so full of hair they were no longer effective.

Nearly on cue, a gust of wind rushed over the back of our horse and caused the stuck fur to take flight. I watched the rings of hair float away. Suddenly, an idea jumped to the forefront of my mind. "Hey! Look at that! God is blowing bubbles!"

Her little body shook with laughter. "Do you think we could join Him?" I asked. Quickly, we reloaded our shedding blades with fur and raised our tools high in the air. Another gust of wind sent our winter-coat-bubbles floating. Together we giggled for the next half hour blowing bubbles with God. Sometimes He blew, sometimes we tried to blow. Either way, our smiles expanded as the area around us was slowly covered with circles of hair.

Reflecting back on that day, I realize we could've been pretty frustrated. By the end of our grooming session, we both looked more like colossal exhibits of static electricity and horse hair than actual people. Okay, so maybe that's an exaggeration, but staying clean wasn't going to happen. Instead, this moment was about joining a young girl in her childlike delight.

If we look, we'll see God's gifts all around us, sometimes even *on* us. There is such simple and profound beauty in all God's creation: horses, children, sunshine, wind, and hair. Only our amazing Lord would combine them to tickle the heart of a child by making winter-coat-bubbles. James said it well,

"Whatever is good and perfect comes down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens."

— James 1:17

HAVING FUN WITH HORSE HAIR!