



# AROUND *the* FIRE

NEWS FROM CRYSTAL PEAKS YOUTH RANCH

WINTER 2010

## A HERO'S EXAMPLE

BY KIM MEEDER

Her crystal blue eyes twinkled with all the glorious impishness of a small, eleven year old girl. Looking up at my face, Brooke declared, "Did you know that Hero is my hero? I just love him so much." I glanced down into one of the most adorable smiles I'd ever seen. Her large front teeth were each sweetly separated by tiny spaces, giving her grin a unique elfin quality. I smiled back and agreed, "Hero is one of my heroes too!" I closed the paddock gate and put my hand on Brooke's back, guiding her as we walked her favorite horse toward the main yard.

The day was cold and a low gray sky embraced the ranch. Even still, the demure weather was no match against the magnificent pink that radiated from my young friend's flushed cheeks. Brooke was thrilled to spend time with her beloved equine friend and everything about her—including her cheeks—proclaimed this truth.

Random thoughts streamed through my mind as my tiny blond sidekick and I brushed the residual effects of a recent snow flurry off Hero's back. What makes a genuine hero? By what definition does one fit into such a celebrated category? Armed with these questions, I decided to check in with the expert at my elbow. "So Brookie, when did Hero become so special to you?"

A small giggle preceded a flood of girlish chatter. "Special to me? No, I think I'm special to *him!* When he first came to the ranch and was still hurt, I would visit him with my mom. Even though other kids were feeding him carrots, he would stand still and just stare at me. Sometimes he would walk past

everyone and come and stand by me, not because I had treats—I didn't—but because he really *SAW* me. He *wanted* to be with me."

She paused, lingering in the memory of when she was first chosen by a horse. Reaching for the bucket of grooming supplies, her attention veered back to the present. I continued to inquire, "Hmm, were you afraid of all his scars?" I watched her blond eyebrows press together as she looked at me, "What scars?" Curious to know her perspective, I proceeded, "Well, he's missing an eye and there's nothing there but an empty hole. Didn't that scare you?"

Brooke laughed again, "Oh no, I think that's so cool! He kinda looks like a pirate! You might not believe me, but I've always wanted to ride a one-eyed horse. When I first saw Hero, I fell in love with him exactly how he was. And then when I got to ride him, it was like a miracle!"

I looked at Brooke, "Wow! That's amazing! What made riding him feel like a miracle?" She dropped her curry-comb into the brush bucket and retrieved a body brush, "It was a miracle

because I have dyslexia and see things differently, and he has one eye and so he sees things differently too. He understands me and I understand him. He's been through some really hard times and so have I."

Now, it was my turn to push my eyebrows together, "What hard times?"

I watched as the rhythm of Brooke's brushing slowed, "I miss my dad." The impact of her comment took me by surprise. I was suddenly jerked back to a similar age in my own childhood...



*Continued on page 2*

when I missed my dad too. “He’s in the Army National Guard and he’s been gone a really long time.”

Snapping back to the present, I gently pressed in, “When you miss him so much, what makes you feel better?”

She smiled again, “That’s easy! I come here. When my heart gets sad, I love to come to the ranch because this is where I feel safe and everybody here is my friend—the leaders, the horses and even the dogs!” A delightful wave of giggles washed around us and then she continued. “But I still think that Hero is my *best* friend. One of the things I love most about him is that he still chooses to be happy. He makes me want to be happy like him.”

Suddenly, I was the one who was smiling. “Okay, now I know how you first met him and why you love him... but what makes him your *hero*?”

My little friend drew a deep breath. Her gaze was steady as she contemplated this question. Then, as quickly as her pause began, it ended. “Hero is my hero for a lot of reasons. First of all, my most special place in the whole world is on his back. When I sit on him, I feel closer to my dad. I also feel closer to God. Hero’s my hero because he teaches me a lot about the Lord too. He’s like a furry mirror that reflects how much God loves me. When I’m with him I feel so special. I know that if he could talk, he’d tell me that he loves me, that I’m special and that I’m smart and pretty.” Glancing at me with a coy grin, Brooke continued.

“Sometimes, I think God talks through Hero. You know, in a way that you hear inside. He lets me know that I’m going to be okay.” Without warning, tears filled my eyes. *I did* know. During my darkest days and beyond, the Lord had spoken to me in the same way.

“I think he’s the perfect example of a hero because he chose not to give up and die. He encourages people to choose life, to keep living no matter how hard it is. But he’s *my* hero because he just *loves me so much*. I think on a scale of one to ten, I’d give him a ten... THOUSAND!” Laughing at her own joke, Brooke inadvertently gave me a moment to gather my thoughts. Since the loss of my parents, I too, have found refuge and solace on the back of a horse. In this same place I’ve also known a unique closeness to God.

While combing out Hero’s tangled mane, Brooke moved closer to her pal and said, “You give such good gifts.” With that, she leaned in and kissed his deep red cheek.

Observing such a tender moment inspired me to ask one last question of my little friend. “If Hero could give the whole world a Christmas gift, what do you think he would choose?”

Brooke turned toward me with a slow and spreading smile. Her inquisitive expression seemed to ask, ‘Is this a trick question?’ When I held her gaze, she realized I was serious. She quickly responded in a ‘silly goose’ sort of way, but she spoke words of childlike faith. “Well, of course he would give love... because he already knows it’s the greatest gift of all. I think he would give it with his life. You know, like if someone was really sick or had cancer and his life could make them feel better, Hero would give it... he would give it all.”

There it was, wisdom spoken beyond the realm of what most of this world will ever understand. I watched Brooke continue to groom Hero’s mane. No wonder Jesus asks us to come to Him like a little child. Kids get it! I was the student and the little blonde authority at my side was the teacher.

With a single stroke, she painted a clear picture of a hero.

A hero is someone who wants to be with us. They aren’t ashamed of their scars, whether others notice them or not. Just being with a hero feels like a miracle, in part because they make us know that we’re safe, special and loved. A hero ultimately chooses joy and they reflect God and make it easier to get to know Him. Perhaps most of all, a genuine hero already knows that love is the greatest gift of all... and they give it with their life.

As Brooke already clarified, the example our small, red horse reflects is the *true* Hero. He *does* want to be with us. He *isn’t* ashamed of His scars for us. Being with Him *is* a miracle. We *are* uniquely special to Him, and within His embrace we *are* safe. He *is* the Author of joy. Because of the reflection of His life, we *can* know God. And certainly most of all, He gave His life so we would know the greatest gift of all—*His* love.

At times, all of us struggle to find the perfect gift, something uplifting and meaningful. Yet, before me stood a child and horse who already knew what that was. Together, they understood that LOVE has always been before us, it has always been free to receive and give.

Jesus is our true example. He has come into our world of hurt and chosen to love us where we are. With Him comes pure love, hope and peace. During this Christmas season, how might you reflect His heroic example? Where might you be called to bring His love? To whom might you carry the greatest gift of all?

*Friends, within this season of giving—  
let’s purpose to imitate and celebrate the HERO  
of heroes... Jesus Christ.*



# MY FAVORITE TIME OF YEAR

BY TROY MEEDER

For many reasons, Christmas is my favorite time of year. Filled with decorated trees, the laughter of children and steaming mugs of hot cider, it is a wonderful reminder of our Savior born. Christmas heralds a time of peace, redemption and gratitude.

Welcoming another winter season with frosty mornings and falling snow, I find myself reminiscent and deeply grateful for this past year. I'm thankful for the children, the horses, the staff...and for you. Over the past fifteen years, thousands of families have been served by the ranch. More than 325 horses have been rescued from abuse. Countless children have found encouragement.

Lives have been forever changed... thanks—in part—to you.

From the very beginning, our programs have been offered free of charge. However, operating this ministry costs a great deal. Every year tens of thousands of dollars are appropriated for feed, vet care, family support, programming and staff.

At Crystal Peaks, our conviction is to be prudent with what we're given and to 'pay as we go.' Because of your faithful giving and our commitment to 'old school' values, we are moving into our sixteenth year of operation without debt and fiscally strong.

From everyone here at the ranch—the Board of Directors, the staff, the horses, our families, and Kim and I—together offer our most heartfelt thanks. We deeply appreciate each of you and your support of us with prayer, friendship, encouragement and finances.

You're a part of all we do and you have richly blessed the work of this ministry.

*Merry Christmas dear friend. May the King of Kings fill you with peace and hope, and may He be the reason you celebrate this "favorite time of year."*



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

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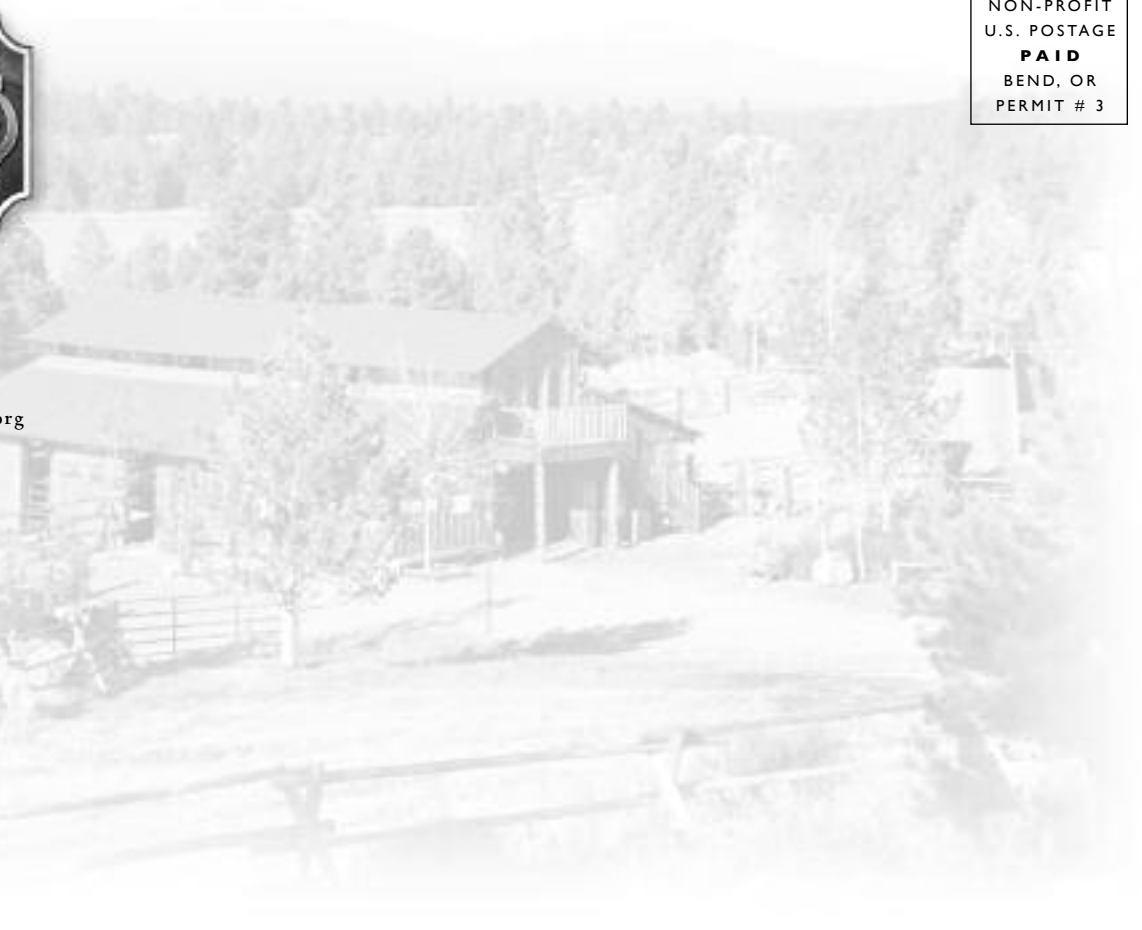
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## Our 2011 CPYR Calendar is now available!



In the coming year, we hope that the cherished photos, uplifting scripture and fun kid-quotes in this calendar are an encouragement to all who see them. It is our joy to share this **free** gift from the ranch family to yours. We pray that it will keep our hearts close.

### Two ways to order yours:

- ✿ Go to [www.cpyr.org](http://www.cpyr.org), click on "Merchandise," and then select "2011 Calendar."
- ✿ Fill out and mail this order form to Crystal Peaks.

*Note: if you would like to help offset the cost of the calendars you order, donations can be made through our website or by mail. Each calendar costs us \$7.*

### Happy NEW Year!



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