



AROUND *the* FIRE

NEWS FROM CRYSTAL PEAKS YOUTH RANCH

FALL 2009



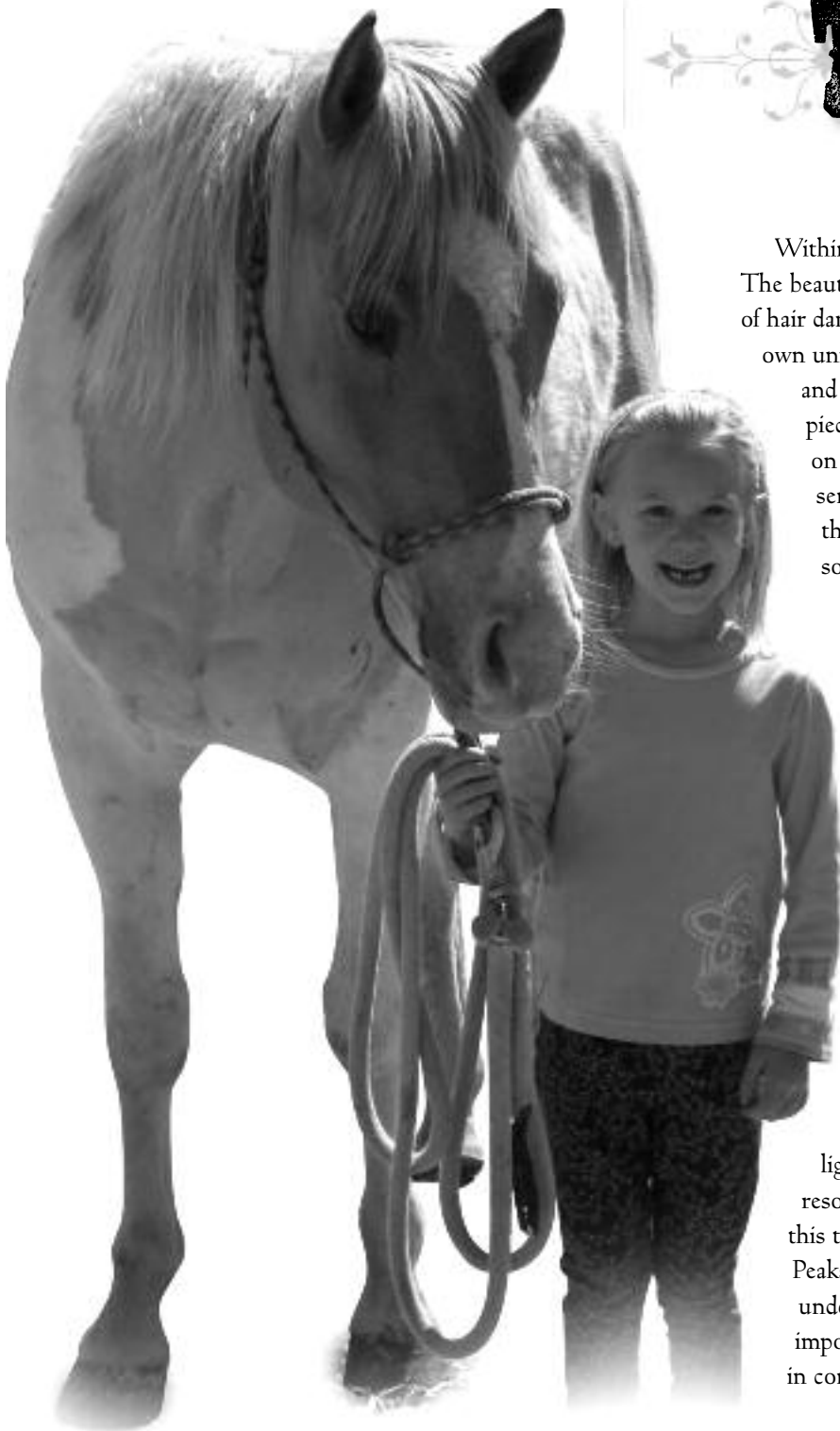
THE SMILE

BY KIM MEEDER

Within this world there are many different types of beauty. The beauty captured in each sunset, each snowflake, each strand of hair dancing in the breeze, each crooked little grin has its own unique glory. Sometimes, rare beauty finds rare beauty and something remarkable happens. Like random puzzle pieces that might be confusing when viewed individually, on occasion they find each other and suddenly make sense. It is within this special place of *fitting together* that individual beauties forge into something incredible, something amazing.

It's hard to believe that it had already been two years since we rescued Mateo, the smallest horse on the ranch. Our tiny dun and white quarter horse/mustang cross stood at only a smidge over 13 hands. Not only does he remain the smallest horse in our care; he is also the most shy. As the sole survivor of a once hellish existence, he came to us with many troubles. The most difficult being a hip that occasionally catches and the worst equine under-bite that I had ever seen. With his head in a downward position, his lower teeth jut nearly an inch beyond his upper teeth. Not a good thing for a creature that needs incisors to line up so they can graze.

Even though his adoption fee was covered by a group of industrious little girls, I still received some lightly veiled criticism as to the logic of spending ranch resources on a *defective* horse. Nevertheless, I believed that this tiny gelding had value and belonged here at Crystal Peaks for a very specific reason. Whether I fully understood the reason was irrelevant. What was most important—is that I trust a God who is relevant, who is in control and who *doesn't make mistakes... ever.*





As Jennifer strolled the ranch with me for the first time, I was acutely aware of the shy six year old at her side. Her toe-headed daughter, Gillian, seemed to almost hide under her thatch of long, nearly white hair. Yet, in studying the child, it was not her hair that caught my attention—but her eyes. Her face scarcely seemed large enough to encompass such enormous eyes. Intelligent, clear blue pools rimmed in cobalt, rotated slowly, purposely, giving silent testimony to her true desire—horses.

Hoping her unspoken wish would become the tie that would bind us; I asked her plainly, “Gillian, if you could do *anything* on the ranch, what would you want to do?” Her gigantic eyes rolled up to look at my face. Without a word, I smiled at Gillian, creating an empty stage for her to fill. After long moments of holding my

gaze, she finally spoke in a small, somber voice, “**I want to ride a horse.**”

Kneeling down to her eye level, I responded in exaggerated enthusiasm, “Really? Well girl, you came to the right place. We can make that happen!” As if my words blew across an ember within her chest, her heart burst into flame. Rapidly glancing between her mothers face and mine, her lips split into a glorious smile... a smile that I *recognized*.

Beaming before me was a radiant, unique smile. Baby lower teeth jutted out before baby upper teeth. Like Mateo, Gillian also had an under-bite.

“Wow! What a beautiful, smile you have! Gillian, did you know that you are the *only* little girl to come to this ranch with such a *special* smile? Hmmm, but there’s another *special* smile on this ranch and I’m pretty sure that he’d like to meet

you. Would you like to meet him?” My question was wordlessly answered with an enthusiastic nod of agreement. With her little hand placed firmly in mine, we walked the short distance to the corral where Mateo lives.

To fuel her courage and protect her tiny feet, I hoisted her up on my hip and entered the corral. As we approached Mateo, I explained to my new friend how shy my little horse was and how he had endured a great deal of pain before coming to us. Because of this, he was still learning how to trust people and will often move his head away from being touched on the face.

Moving to the side of Mateo’s cheek, with Gillian in between us, we stopped. I wanted to give Mateo time to see that we were coming to greet him. To my great surprise, he did not step away from her...

It is only when each piece is joined within the masterpiece of My greater purpose... they become complete... they become truly beautiful."

he stepped *toward* her. As he reached out to her, she reached out to him. Like magnets, shy pulled toward shy. I watched in wonder as tiny fingers stretched toward a tiny forehead. Meeting in the middle, a private miracle sparked into life. Two mirrored halves of a bridge came together. They had found each other.

"Oh my goodness! Mateo is bashful; he's never done that before. I think he's choosing you to be his friend... *you ARE special!*" With her hand still gently rubbing his forehead, she looked at me with a reverse-order grin so brilliant that it could have split rock! It was at that moment that I reached down with my free hand and carefully spread his lips apart. With lower teeth firmly in front of his upper teeth, I proclaimed, "Look Gillian, he's *smiling back at you!*" Upon seeing his teeth, her mouth and eyes opened wide in pure astonishment, "*He DOES smile like me!*"

As she continued to stare at his mouth, I added, "No one else on the ranch shares this wonderful uniqueness. Only you and Mateo have this special gift." While watching Gillian try to grasp such an incredible moment, the bigger picture began to clarify in my mind. Mateo's funky hip and jaw were *not a mistake*. He *does* belong here, if only to reflect the rare beauty of an extraordinary little girl. I could hear the voice of my Lord speak,

"She is perfect... he is perfect... together they shine for *Me*. It is only when each piece is joined within the masterpiece of My greater purpose... they become complete... they become truly beautiful."



After an incredible session with Gillian, I took her upstairs into the barn to a gigantic pile of stuffed toys that a selfless young woman donated. As a keepsake of our time together, I asked my little friend to pick the one that called out to her. After rummaging through a near mountain of plush animals, Gillian finally turned around, clutching a treasure to her little chest. Holding it up for my

inspection, I could see that she had chosen a small white horse with butterscotch spots. With a shy turn of her head, she said, "Mateo chose me... now *I'm choosing him*. From now on, we will always be together."

True to her word, with only one exception, Gillian has ridden Mateo every time she's come to the ranch. At home, stuffed Mateo sleeps nestled beneath her arm every night. Her mother told me recently how she took Gillian to the dentist. Once boosted up into his chair, her previous self-consciousness had transformed into something else, something new—courage. It was at that moment when pure innocence declared, "It's okay that I have an under-bite. The horse I ride has an under-bite just like me. He loves me and I love him. It's really okay that we smile the same. That's what makes us special. That's what makes us friends."

Within this world there are many different types of beauty: a sunset, a snowflake, a smile. Sometimes rare beauty finds rare beauty... and something remarkable happens. We might not see it right away, but make no mistake, *God DOES!* In His eyes we are each unique and special. Yet, it is when we choose to stand in our uniqueness and reflect *His glory*... that we are truly the most beautiful of all.

A HERO'S

BY KIM MEEDER

PARADE

The Fourth of July is a special day for so many reasons. It has always been a time for the Ranch to celebrate the glorious treasure of our freedom. The adage is true—Freedom is *not* free. Freedom does not simply *happen*, it involves choice, it involves action and it involves perseverance.

Whether as a nation or an individual, the cost of freedom is as unique as how we choose to honor it. For a little horse that once was judged unfit to live, his road toward freedom became a choice to *never give up*. Even with two bullets fired into his beautiful head, a destroyed left eye, a badly infected leg wound, a broken jaw, near lethal blood loss and a lead rope continually tangled around his legs, *he did not quit*.



Perhaps, knowing intuitively that every season of suffering has a beginning and an end, every wilderness of sorrow has a boundary, he put one foot in front of the other. The horse we named Hero kept walking toward the horizon of hope, the illuminated rim of freedom. In so doing, this young, badly wounded Arabian gelding

inspired countless individuals across this nation to follow him. One step at a time, he stirred others to keep moving through their own hardship, their own personal wilderness of pain toward freedom.

Because of his indomitable spirit of courage, Hero *walked through* his valley of death into a new life. Today, he is a happy little one-eyed horse with a scar on his leg. He loves kids and is learning to carry them on his back. He seems to know that he is special, that his remarkable survival has inspired tens of thousands to dig a little deeper, to press in a little harder. In a way that is hard to describe, he appears to understand that his miraculous journey has made him an encouragement to others, a beacon of hope.

Although completely justified to be fearful, angry and untrusting, he is none of these things. Instead he has chosen to be courageous, loving and confident. Hero has become such an icon of optimism that we decided to feature him in a local Fourth of July parade. Mashed amongst eight horses, a truck, a float and approximately 75 kids, staff and volunteers, Hero walked through a river of cheering humanity.

Echoing on either side of us, I could hear, "*Look! There goes the horse that was shot!*" While leading him through the crush, a wave of celebration rolled out behind Hero as those who recognized him



began to point and cheer. Not unlike the veterans who rode our horses ahead of him, Hero also represented a piece of freedom. Like them, he fought to survive and because together they did... the world is a little bit better.

Like the men and women of our armed forces whom he came to celebrate, as they are, so is he. Together they made a choice, they took action, they pushed forward—and something amazing happened. Each reflected how a genuine hero inspires those around them to persevere.

True to his name... *he IS a Hero.*



THE BEST MEDICINE

BY KIM MEEDER

Isaac, our most recently rescued horse is doing very well. The horrific fracture that crushed the bridge of his nose has completely healed. Yet, with all sutures from his face, eyebrow and poll removed and the slice through his tongue mended, what remains to be restored... medicine *cannot* help.

As severe as his physical injuries were, the wounds in his spirit were much worse. The multiple fractures to his face were only a partial reflection of the complete shattering of his confidence and trust. As with physical healing, these emotional wounds take time to recover. Beyond the reach of medical care, Isaac's remedy now lays in a single cure—*love*.



Few emotional fractures can stand against the power of consistent love exemplified over time. Lapping like waves from a great ocean, perpetual love wears away the most resistant fear. Even the stalwart walls of anxiety, sorrow and loneliness will collapse when undermined with pure love. Unfortunately, we often give up on allowing our love to flow once we believe that a meager tide seems unsuccessful. Yet, the key dwells within each of us—our real power resides in commitment, in consistency,

in never giving up our ability to pour out love on those around us who are wounded.

Because kids frequently give unconditional love so much better than adults, I often seek their unique ability to help me rehabilitate broken horses. Since Isaac's face was crushed in a trailer loading accident, this is where I've been employing the love of little one's to help him learn that simply because his past was terrifying—his future doesn't have to be.

Each session involves slightly different aspects of trust, confidence and moving forward. I continue to marvel as Isaac has transformed from a trembling wreck at the mere sight of a trailer, to trusting us enough to repeatedly step into the very place where he previously thought he would certainly die. During one such trailer loading session, I watched as a teenaged, freckled face *doctor* went to work, applying her brand of unconditional love, the best medicine of all. A few days later, this simple confirmation arrived in the mail.



Dear Isaac,
I loved being with you last week. I had a lot of fun.
you are the Best horse ever. I would love to work with you all the time. Because your fun to be with you.
I just love see you happy there and everyone around you, it makes me so happy to see you like that. Hope you get beter too.
P.S. I love you so much, don't forget that!

UNHINDERED SIGHT

BY SARAH BECK

Working as the Ranch Greeter for the afternoon, another busy Tuesday hummed with the joy of welcoming families up the hill. Around me, the ranch teemed with activity. Within the midst of the usual whirlwind, a new family caught my attention. As the group slowly walked up our driveway, I noticed the protective way the adults in the family gathered around a tiny, beautiful child. Drawing nearer, I could see a familiar look in their eyes: *uncertainty*.

With great animation, I introduced myself to the adults and then knelt to meet the little girl. As soon as my knee touched the ground, the blonde-headed child clung to the back of her mother's leg, hiding her face from mine. She offered little response to my quiet inquiries.

Almost apologetically, her father answered the unspoken question in my eyes, "Our three year old daughter is blind."

Even though this family was not on our schedule for the day, I knew that God had led them up the driveway for a reason—*His* reason. As our conversation continued, the father explained that while vacationing in our area, they had one simple wish, that their daughter would meet a horse for the first time. Earlier that day, they had visited a different riding program which turned them away. Apparently, working with a three year old blind child was just too great of a liability. Their request to pet a horse over the fence had also been declined. Looking down at her, compassion filled my heart. This small girl was denied the opportunity to even touch a horse for one reason: *she could not see*.



Gratefully, the same employee who had been unable to allow this little one into their program, cast out a random suggestion. "We can't take her here, but there is a ranch down the road that you might try. It's called Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch."

Upon this thread of hope, they had made their way up the hill and gathered their courage one more time. Their request was simple, "Would it be possible for our daughter to touch a horse?"

Quickly responding with an enthusiastic, "Yes!" I watched a wave of relief wash over the entire family. After settling them on a bench, I went to retrieve one of our horses. As I walked into the main corral, I quickly asked God to show me the right four legged companion for this unique little girl. The answer returned as quickly as an anvil falling through a roof! "Gideon." Smiling to myself, I haltered our sweet, spotted pony.

Gideon was the perfect choice. He had much in common with my new friend. Having been born with only one functioning eye, he too suffered with blindness. Even though Gideon was only able to see half of the activity around him, he chose to trust his rider to keep him safe. While tying him to the hitching rail, I knew this meeting was going to be much more than a simple coincidence.

Guided by her mother's gentle hand, I watched as miniature fingers blindly reached for Gideon's coat. With contact, the child's expression flashed. This was her first glimpse of a horse. Adult hands steered the child's hands to rhythmically move over the pony's soft body. Not wanting the moment to end, I quietly asked if they would like to have their daughter simply sit on Gideon's back.



Awe, wonder and joy shaped the tiny face before me as she eased onto Gideon's back. Soon, her tiny fingers wove tangled patterns through the length of his soft mane. Within the company of each other, a child and her horse found understanding.

It's true; God lifts desperate hearts into pastures of hope and uses seemingly insignificant things in the process. A half blind pony may be *useless* to some, but He was perfect to complete God's plan to love this little girl. A tiny, blind three year old may be a *liability* to some, but to God, she too is a part of His perfect master plan.

NOW FAITH
IS BEING SURE
OF WHAT WE
HOPE FOR
AND CERTAIN OF
WHAT WE DO
NOT SEE.

~Hebrew 11:1 (NIV)



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

Please use my donation for:

- 1 Where it is needed most
- 1 The Children
- 1 The Horses
- 1 Potential Property Expansion
- 1 Endowment Fund

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“Whoever drinks
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 become in him a
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 welling up to
 eternal life.”

— JOHN 4:14



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