

HOPE FOR THE FAMILY

AROUND the FIRE

SPRING 2016

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

GOLDEN GIRL

BY CHRIS DAIS

(*Kim's Older Sister*)

I love my backyard golden girls. They free range our small acreage, demolishing any unsuspecting bug in our yard and goat pen. Days of careful searching for a seemingly lost bird proved fruitless. Since her breed, Orpingtons, have a tenancy to be broody, I hoped that she was on a nest somewhere. Then, as I was serving up breakfast for the goats, I noticed a spot of gold wedged between the wall of the barn and the bales of hay. She was not moving. By lying on the bales and jamming my shoulder down as far as possible, I could just barely reach her. I thumped on her back several times. No response...sadness rose in my throat...I was too late.

I would need to move about half the hay bales in the small barn to reach the chicken. Discouraged and short on time, I

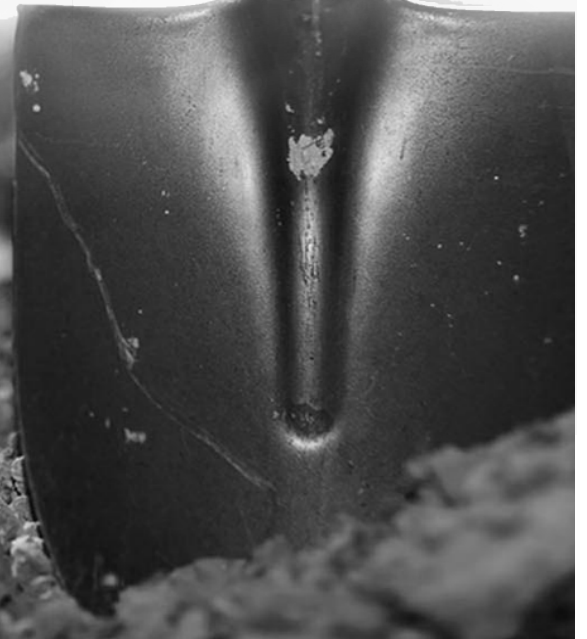
hurried off to work.

The following morning was beautiful, cool and crisp. I picked up a shovel and walked to the back of our property. The dawning light filtered through the tall pines in the stillness of the early morning. Disturbing the heavy dew, I turned over shovelful-by-shovelful of dirt. Silence wrapped around me. The sound of my shovel breaking the earth was all that could be heard as I dug the small grave.

I hated the separation of death, the whole process of grief and acceptance. It was an old nemesis. How many dear, loved ones had I lost? Then it occurred to me, it was the anniversary—the very day—of my parent's death. Lord, why, oh why, of all days am

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*"Tears filled my eyes as I continued to dig.
Familiar scriptures flooded my mind."*



I digging a grave today?

Tears filled my eyes as I continued to dig. Familiar scriptures flooded my mind.

1 Corinthians 15:54-57, "When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' 'O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?'" (ESV)

John 11:23-26, "Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to Him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?'" (ESV)

Lord, I believe. But sometimes the sense of loss is so strong.

I walked up to the barn and started moving bales. Chaff flew as I moved the hay around in the small space. Finally, I uncovered the last bale. I pushed it sideways and sat down. My beautiful golden chicken was now in reach.

It's funny how hope continues even when things look bleak. While moving the bales I kept checking and hoping that maybe I was mistaken. Through it all the chicken didn't move. Finally, I reached down to pick her up. Gently, I brought her out of the hole and into the light. To my utter shock and surprise, she jumped out of my hands and limped around the barn! Freed from her long entrapment she greedily devoured the food and water I set out for her. By the end of the day her limp disap-

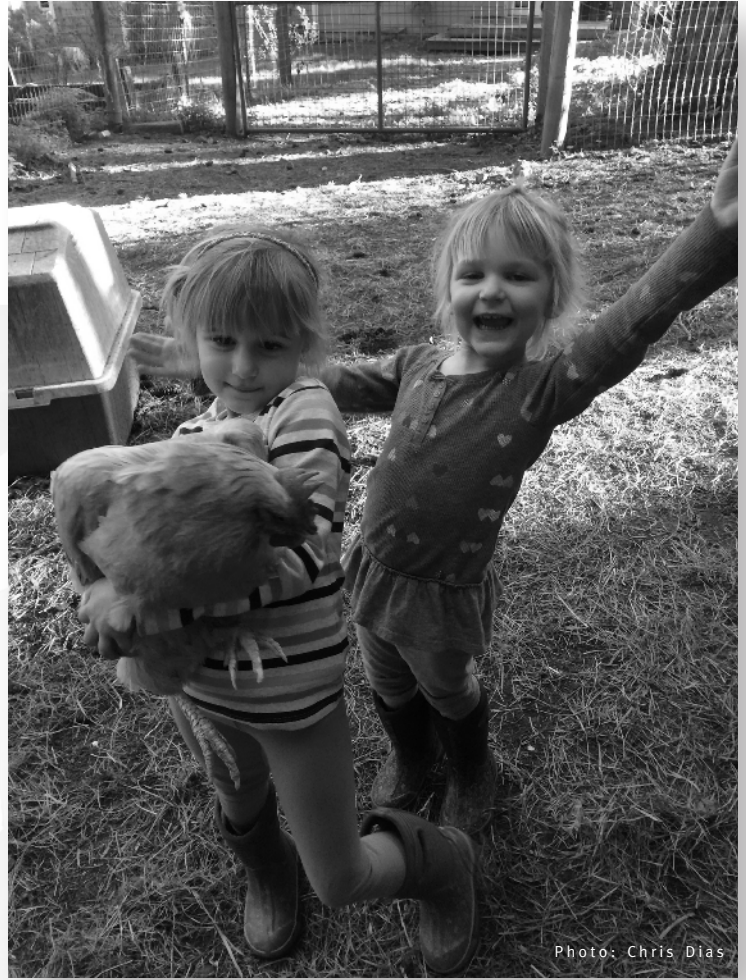


Photo: Chris Dias



peared, and she was just one of the girls again.

Lord, what a wonder! I moved the bales back and walked with joy back to the gravesite. I stood with shovel in hand looking at the empty grave and thought of My Lord's empty grave. In the stillness of the awakening day the Lord spoke to my heart.

"Child, someday ALL the graves will be empty."

"Look, the home of God is now among His people! 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 sorrow or crying or pain." Revelation 21:3b-4 (NLT)

*"...I am the
resurrection and
the life. Whoever
believes in Me,
though he die,
yet shall he live..."*
—John 11:25, (ESV)

Daily Miracles

BY KIM MEEDER

Miracles happen everyday. Whether we believe that statement or not has no effect on how God continues to move and work. Seeing the miraculous is like seeing true beauty, if we don't see it . . . it's simply because we're not truly looking.

It was late in the afternoon and my 4:00 pm appointment was already waiting for me in the ranch main yard. Amy amazed me. She was currently going through one of the most devastating experiences any mother of two can endure. Her husband of 22 years had left his two little girls and the wife of his youth. Despite the heartache and challenge, Amy was fighting hard to remain positive and strong for her daughters.



Within this black season, she had turned whole heartedly to the only One who could genuinely, permanently help her—Jesus. By trusting Him for a place to live, a way to pay her bills and the means to feed and support her girls, she was able to find peace in the midst of their storm. For her, every day was a high-wire faith walk of trusting the Lord to hold her up as she dared to take affirmative steps into what looked and felt impossible.

While embracing my dear friend within the beautiful chaos of children, staff, horses and families all swirling together in the ranch yard, she laughed in my ear. Seeking to explain her laughter, she began, “I have to tell you the funniest thing that

happened today. My girls and I were joking about being so low on groceries that we might have to start looking for ‘road-kill’ to add to our menu! It just made all of us laugh so hard. I was still laughing when I went into work and I just blurted out, “I hope I hit a COW on the way home tonight . . . because my girls and I are getting pretty hungry!”

She went on to explain how it didn't even occur to her that what was a hilarious stress reliever of humor for a struggling single mom and her two junior high girls . . . was hideous to her coworkers!

“Kim! They thought I was serious!” she exclaimed. “I didn't even consider that they might not get my joke—until I saw their horrified looks! Who knew that the human jaw could drop that far?!”

In that honest moment, I laughed heartily with my friend . . . but for a completely different reason.

Amy had no idea what had happened at the ranch only hours before.

Earlier in the day, a call came into my office. I was alerted that a dear neighbor, Mary Claire, had dropped by the ranch to leave a ‘gift.’ As I approached her, I noticed that she had a curious, almost apologetic look on her face.

“Hi Kim! I know this might be a bit odd as far as a gift, but the Lord has spoken very clearly to my heart. Please forgive me if this seems somewhat unusual—but—here goes. My family just butchered our annual steer. As we were processing it, Jesus made it obvious that we were to give one quarter of the harvested beef to . . . Crystal Peaks . . . is this something you can use?”

After explaining what had been donated earlier to Amy, I led her over to the ranch freezer. “Friend, you don't need to answer

your own prayers and ‘aim for a cow!’ Jesus has already provided. Take as much as you want. Today, Jesus sent YOU a special delivery!”

“And my God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from His glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.”
Philippians 4:19, (NLT).

Indeed, miracles do happen every day—and if we don't see them—it's simply because we're not truly looking.

Now, I was the one who was laughing hard!

If only Mary Claire and Amy's coworkers would've been there to see the look on her face as I opened the lid of the freezer! Who knew the human jaw could drop that far?!



Photos: Kim Meeder

THE VOICE

BY PAUL STEERE

It was a beautiful sunny afternoon at Crystal Peaks. Birds singing, children running, little prayer groups divided all over the main yard. Another day of ranch life, a life I'd come to love very much. I'd just finished my first session and—with a list of chores on my mind—was walking across the main yard to the office. That's when I noticed a mother and her two sons sitting at a picnic table by themselves.

Unlike most families that come to the ranch, they seemed uncomfortable, out of place, almost as if they were waiting for an appointment with the dentist. As I watched them, the quiet voice of my Lord spoke, "Go over there and welcome them." My first reaction was, "I can't. I have chores to take care of and besides, that's the Greeter's job." Again, I heard, "Don't worry about that right now. You have time . . . go."

I'd been pressing in to hear the voice of God and didn't know if this was the voice I'd been searching for . . . I had to find out. I couldn't just walk over and say "Hello." Me being me, I chose to run up behind them and leap over the table onto the bench! Startled, they broke into nervous laughter. "Hey! How ya'll doin'?" was how I began our conversation.

The two sons were quiet, but their mother was willing to engage. She said they were fine and had just driven up from the south and had booked sessions for later in the day. They'd arrived almost two hours early and were just waiting. The voice came to me again, "Paul, here's your opportunity . . . take it!" I asked if they'd been shown around the ranch. When the mom said they hadn't, I offered them a tour. They accepted and I showed them around, telling them the powerful story of the ranch.

Soon, the boys started to relax. They asked questions and even laughed at my goofy jokes. Our brief time together was enjoyable and fun. I was pleased to leave them on a good note and quickly returned to finish my tasks.

A short time later, I learned that my second session was with Easton, one of the two boys who I'd just spent time with. Well, hot dog! Thanks to an impromptu tour, this young man was

already comfortable around me. I was moved that the first thing he wanted to do was find a quiet place to talk.

The ranch was very busy and the only unoccupied place we could find was the hay barn. As we climbed up on the bails, I sensed this was the perfect place. Once settled, Easton began his incredible story. At 14 years of age, he'd already experienced things others four-times his age should never have to go through.

Beneath his rough exterior lived a hurt, broken, boyish soul crying out for help.

Clearly, I'd been chosen to work with him. As his story poured out, I silently prayed, Father, what do I tell him? I'm not a professional counselor. Outside of my own life, I've never dealt with anyone going through these things.

Again, the voice came, "Just listen to him . . . you will hear some of your own story. He doesn't need a professional counselor . . . he just needs a friend." Sheepishly those weren't the words I wanted to hear—but they were the words I needed to hear.

For 45 minutes, Easton talked and I simply listened. When he seemed finished, we left the hay barn and headed toward the main paddock to pick out a horse. Since it was only his first time at the ranch, he didn't know any of the horses. Prayerfully, I chose a horse for him, one whose broken past seemed to match Easton's. I chose Halo.

I knew that pairing a hurting boy and a once hurting horse was going to be a session I'd never forget. While Easton stroked the gelding, I shared Halo's story.

This young horse had spent much of his young life running. Fear drove him to escape many enclosures.

During one flight, he was hit by a semi-truck. Until the time he was rescued by the ranch, he'd never known the touch of a human hand. Yet, by looking at him, you'd never know his painful past. By experiencing the love and affection of God through an incredibly caring and compassionate ranch staff, Halo was now one of the gentlest horses on the ranch.

While recounting Halo's story, I noticed Easton starting to smile. Perhaps he understood he wasn't alone in his experiences. During the grooming and tacking process, the quiet voice inside rose again, "Paul, I can use anyone . . . stop leaning on your own abilities and learn to trust Me . . . I've got this!" I smiled, a little ashamed of myself. "Take this opportunity," He continued. "Use the round pen."

Yes Sir, Jesus. You got it! I responded in thought.





“Easton,” I said. “Before we ride, I want to show you something.” We led Halo to the round pen and let him go free. I guided the young man to the center of the ring. “Watch, Halo is running circles trying to find happiness and freedom on his own. By ordering him to come to you when he isn’t willing . . . will only lead him to disrespect you. If he thinks there’s something better out there for him—he won’t trust you—he’ll drive both of you crazy trying to get it.” I glanced at Easton and continued, “Just let him run. He must choose to figure this out for himself.”

Soon, Halo started to lower his head. Tired from running, he was ready to submit.

I moved outside the pen and guided Easton from the gate. With instruction to receive Halo, I asked the boy to rub the gelding’s face and neck, rewarding him with pure love. Then, I asked Easton to turn and walk away. To the boy’s surprise, the horse followed. “Try running away!” I called out, “See what happens.”

Easton took off running. He looked back grinning when he saw Halo following close behind. I had him try a few things to see if Halo would leave him. Not a chance. Halo stuck right by his new friend.

I joined the pair in the round pen and began to explain. “Easton, Halo is a lot like you and me. He thought that by running off he could find his own happiness. What he actually found was loneliness and hardship. The truth is, it’s not until we turn our eyes to Jesus—in the center—in our hearts—that’s when we experience true peace. He knows us better than anyone. He created us. He knows what we need better than we do. And, He really wants us to know Him—to experience Him. He has so much for us! Halo, in his unique way, understands this. He’s not leaving you for anything. He loves you and he’s proving it with his actions. He wants to be right by your side! I don’t know about you but I’m ready to give God the reins.” Without words, Easton turned and hugged Halo. He finally understood.

After saying goodbye to Easton, I watched him walk down the driveway. I thanked God and vowed to never again doubt His voice in my life.

I pondered how we so often believe we’re inadequate and have little to offer others. But today proved how wrong this thinking is. God wants us to experience Him. He has a plan for each of us and if we will only trust Him . . . He will show us! Like Halo in the round pen, when we stop running and turn our eyes back to Him . . . He is waiting to give us rest, recovery . . . and to show the depth of His love for us!

The truth is: Jesus is always talking . . . we just need to listen . . . listen to the voice . . . listen to His voice.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight.” Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV)



Photos: Katie Jacobsen

Childlike

BY KIM MEEDER

Kids just get it! Apart from God's Word, nearly every wise and wonderful thing I've ever learned has been through the children and horses that have surrounded me over the years.

The genuine 'pure-heartedness' of a child IS the deep soil needed for the truth of God's Word to flourish. Held fast within this most precious place, the tarnish of empty 'religion' cannot reach. Nor can the weeds of doubt, unbelief and complacency find a home. Because pride and fear haven't been cultivated, the fruit of embarrassment and uncertainty don't exist.

No wonder Jesus encouraged adults to become more childlike in that place within where faith grows.

Not long ago, I had the privilege of traveling to the Midwest to help shoulder with Heartland Youth Ranch, one of our Similar Ministries. During our time together, we spoke at length about the importance of prayer and worship individually and as a ministry team.

With this truth firmly in place, we made the decision to engage together in what we call "Immersion Worship." The instructions were simple: we will play 30 minutes of music that honors Jesus. During this time, find a quiet place to come before the Lord. Ask Him for NOTHING—instead, use the allotted time to only worship the Lord in whatever way HE desires. This is accomplished—in part—by LISTENING to HIM and simply doing what He asks of each individual. This can look as unique as each one called to worship—standing, kneeling, arms raised, laying flat—and for each individual, it's beautiful.

For most, getting into a position of genuine worship usually incites a battle with our fear, our pride, or both. Instantly, we

fear what those around us might think. Or, our pride despises honest humility and the potential of being embarrassed. Our personal walls of humanity, the ones that care so much about what people think—and so little of what God thinks—must come down.

Through the years, I've learned that this means of worship is a powerful 'recalibration' within every Believer of WHO we are truly calling our God. When our body submits into a position of adoration, our Spirit is usually quick to follow. Within this sacred place of loving surrender, the embedded arrows of the enemy melt away before the Presence of our Holy, Compassionate and Almighty God.

The weather was momentarily kind enough to allow us to meander into the ranch front yard and find a solitary place to get quiet before the Lord. I felt lead to go down to the ranch driveway—where every visitor would pass—and kneel in the middle of the gravel road. From this distance, the music was faint, but I heard enough to be able to move into a worshipful attitude.

On a small ranch in the heartland of this great nation, I knelt in the gravel, with my arms in the air. Almost instantly, I had a strong impression to remove my shoes. Like hearing approaching thunder, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY" rolled through my heart, "This is HOLY ground . . . ground where MY PRESENCE resides." As the Spirit of the Lord saturated the place around me, kneeling in the gravel quickly became forehead down in the gravel. The deep love of God was covering, filling, anointing everything about this simple little ranch.

I was overcome.



Photo: Sara Koelling

After long moments, I finally sat back on my heels, arms straight out to my sides. And that's when I heard the sweetest sound, the voice of my Lord, "Beloved . . . look . . . look at Me." I opened my eyes and looked up into the dark gray clouds, searching for something significant. The sky was dull, colorless, more rain approached. Then, as if an unseen finger laid in the groove between my lips and my chin, my head was gently lowered.

That's when I saw him.

At some point during our time of worship, a little boy had also been drawn down to the gravel road. I never heard or saw him approach. He was 20 yards in front of me. All I knew was that his name was James, he was 6 years old and he was the son of one of a volunteer who served the ranch.

Transfixed, I watched him.

I was the farthest away, and he was beyond me . . . no one was in front of him.

There was no one for him to watch or imitate. Everyone else was far to our left, with brush and trees, nearly beyond sight. This little man was by himself . . . before God.

At six years of age, thirty minutes must have felt like thirty years! At the same age, I would've been lost in the pursuit of pretty rocks or bug hunting. But James wasn't. His young focus was on higher things. I watched in awe as he quietly, thoughtfully assumed every position of worship that I'd just sensed the Lord speaking to me.

James was in front of me, he couldn't see me, or anyone else, yet his actions of worship were nearly a mirrored image of what I'd just sensed. Clearly, he was listening to the same Spirit, and had heard the same things.

He didn't fear being by himself. He didn't look around to see if someone was watching in judgment. He was simply a little boy—alone—before his God. Without hesitation, he knelt, bowed, held his arms high and even quietly sang before the King of kings.

“Then Jesus called for the children and said to the disciples, ‘Let the children come to Me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.’” Luke 18:16, (NLT).

Indeed, kids just get it. No wonder Jesus encouraged adults to become more childlike in that place within . . . where faith grows.

Right before my eyes, a six year old willingly did what few adults will ever do . . . he humbled himself—heart, soul, mind and strength—before the Lord God Almighty—simply because he WANTED to.

In that moment, I don't know that I've ever seen 'Jesus' more clearly . . . giving glory to God the Father . . . simply because He wanted to.

**“Without
hesitation, he
knelt, bowed,
held his arms
high...”**



Photo: Kim Meeder

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
- Rescue the Equine
- Mentor the Child
- Hope for the Family
- Empower the Ministry

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SPRING ANNOUNCEMENTS

It's opening day at Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch!

MARCH 21ST 2016

Contact the ranch office at 541-330-0123
for more information about tours and riding sessions.

You're invited to Ranch Fellowship!

Our Ranch Fellowships fall on a selected Tuesday of each month from 5:30-8:00 pm.
Together in this family oriented barn setting, we'll share a meal, worship and teaching from God's Word.

Spring Fellowship dates are:

MARCH 8TH ★ APRIL 12TH ★ MAY 10TH

Disclaimer: All stories written in "Around the Fire" newsletter are true.
Some of the names have been changed to protect individual privacy.