



RESCUE THE EQUINE

the


AROUND FIRE

Summer 2022

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

WARRIOR AND THE RESCUE RANCH

By Sarah Robinett

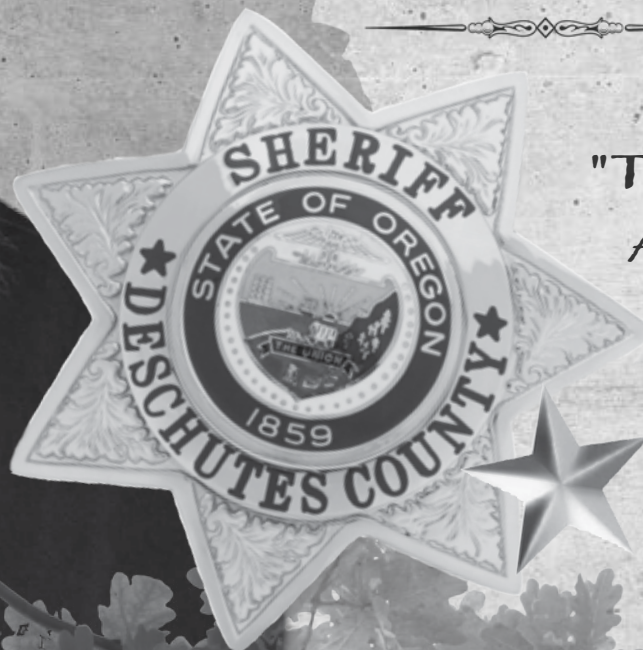


During my first view of the starved equine, I thought his skeletal frame looked more like a dinosaur than a horse. The gelding's dull black coat appeared to stretch nearly beyond its limits to cover his protruding ribs. Kim and I tenderly placed our hands over the gaunt hide in front us. In contrast, the hollow, yet soft expression in his eyes gave him a grandfatherly appearance.

I was surprised to learn he was only in his early teens, an age in which most horses are in their prime. Curious, I asked if the gelding would be up for adoption.

"Not at this time," the Deschutes County Sheriff's officer soberly replied. "He is currently being held as evidence relating to neglect charges. The gelding's previous owners are battling to regain custody over him. We are not able to adopt him out until the case is closed."

Somberly, Kim and I followed the officer to the next paddock of rescued equines. I silently prayed that God would show us how we could help.



"THE LORD IS
A WARRIOR,
YAHWEH IS
HIS NAME"

EXODUS 15:3

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Months earlier, Kim shared with me how Crystal Peaks once had a close working relationship with the Sheriff's Department and it was her desire for that strong bond to be reestablished. During the Ranch's founding years, Kim worked closely with the Department in many horse rescues. A natural drift occurred when she began traveling and speaking. Although the Ranch was still heavily involved in adopting horses in need, no one had fully stepped forward to carry the torch in active partnership with local law enforcement.

Kim offered to help me connect with officers she used to work with and meet new ones who had joined the force more recently. She spoke very highly of a woman named "Laura," who served as her contact for the Department. Kim hoped to introduce me to Laura and rekindle a working relationship through her.

Soon after my conversation with Kim—as if on cue—the Sheriff's Department reached out to Crystal Peaks. We received an official invitation to attend an equine rescue training. I learned Laura was no longer directly in charge of the rescue activities. A new field technician, a woman named Mariya Luefven, had recently taken the lead for all animal abuse cases. Mariya was actively working to rebuild and strengthen ties among horse rescues within the community.

Although I was sad not to meet Laura, the thought of working with Mariya excited me. We were both passionate about our newly vested responsibilities in equine rescue and rehabilitation. We arranged for a time to meet and begin to repave the old pathway of partnership previously shared between Crystal Peaks and the Sheriff's Department.



Photo credit: Katie Guerrero



Photo credit: Kim Meeder

After giving Mariya a quick tour of Crystal Peaks on a snowy day, Kim and I sat with her over warm cups of coffee. Kim relayed encounters of rescue and the history of shared partnership with the Sheriff's Department. She spoke of the Millican Rescue, the largest equine seizure in Oregon State history (detailed in *Bridge Called Hope*). During this event, over one hundred and thirty emaciated horses were removed from a backyard breeding operation. At the mention of the Millican Rescue, Mariya's eyes grew wide with realization.

Mariya shared how after this pivotal rescue event, the County founded the Sheriff's Rescue Ranch. The legal entanglement of housing such a large number of livestock spurred the County to acquire property for the purpose of safely confiscating animals in need. Having a dedicated facility ensured the County was able to immediately begin rehabilitation for the animals who were starving or wounded.

The very existence of the Rescue Ranch where Mariya served was a direct response to the Millican Rescue. Eagerly, we spoke of ways to rekindle and rebuild the shared partnership of helping horses in need.

During the conversation, I sensed an almost electrical current flow between us. Like two live wires coming together to complete a circuit, Mariya and I connected instantly. Our meeting lasted long after our coffee cups were empty and our bodies warmed. Mariya invited us to come visit the Sheriff's Ranch and meet the most recently rescued residents.

After the snow melted, Kim and I made the drive to the Sheriff's Rescue Ranch. Mariya greeted us warmly and motioned for us to follow her around the grounds. On our tour, Kim and I encountered a black horse we had seen in our previous visit. Mariya described how the Department recently seized the neglected gelding along with his two pasture mates. The owners were contesting for repossession.

The gelding's withered frame testified to his mistreatment. Mariya shared how he had already gained a great deal of weight since his arrival. I knew under her deeply compassionate authority, the dark horse would receive the highest standard of care toward recovery.

During our time together, I noticed—despite the serious nature of her work—Mariya displayed a confident joy. Under her diligent attention, the animals at the Sheriff's Ranch were thriving. After our tour was complete, we promised to stay in touch.

Back at Crystal Peaks, the team and I prayed for God to show us how to come alongside the Sheriff's Department and Mariya in their current work. We trusted Jesus to show us the way.

Mariya and I remained in communication. After a full season for Crystal Peaks—and the Sheriff's Department—she let me know they had a gentle gelding that might be a good fit for our children's riding program. Kim and I returned to the Sheriff's Ranch to meet the little horse. We were introduced to a small gelding with a passionate spirit. I smiled to see he was quite chubby and appeared to be an easy keeper. Mariya shared that he was about 15 years old and possibly an Arabian/Morgan cross. His dark coat and white facial markings looked familiar to me. I felt gears jamming in my brain, *but I couldn't quite place him . . .*

Shaking off my invisible attempt at a memory reboot, I started my evaluation by asking him to circle in the round pen. The gelding responded to my requests with athletic animation, carrying his head and tail high as if he were celebrating a newly-regained ability to move. Although the gelding needed a refresher on manners, he was kind and

willing to learn. To test his nerves, I carefully began waving my jacket around his body. He calmly chose to stand still and didn't seem to care—even when I gently draped my coat over his eyes.

I could feel a grin spread across my face. I liked what I saw. Often, neglected horses struggle with suspicion and fear of humans. Yet, instead of terror, this horse displayed trust. He certainly exhibited potential as a session horse.

Mariya watched for a moment then excused herself. A transport of newly rescued horses had just arrived and she hurried to direct them to the correct paddocks. Kim joined Mariya to assist in any way she might need.

Quickly, I concluded my evaluation and returned the gelding back to his paddock. Eager to see the new arrivals, I headed over to find Kim and Mariya.

I rounded the corner to see a small group of officers observing the most recent additions to the Rescue Ranch—two skeletal horses. I stepped forward for a better view when Kim called for me. I shifted my eyes off the emaciated mares to see my friend standing beside an armed deputy, a tall woman with long dark hair.

"Sarah," Kim beamed, ". . . *this is Laura*—my contact with the Sheriff's Department when Crystal Peaks first started."

Laura smiled and shook my hand. "Yes, we worked on many rescue cases together. I am pleased to meet you."

In awe and amazement, I responded by letting her know what an honor it was to meet her. I then listened as Kim and Laura briefly caught up like old friends. Laura was glad to hear an update on Phoenix—our beloved equine whom she helped bring to Crystal Peaks. Moved with compassion, Laura had also adopted a horse from the Millican Rescue.



Photo credit: Kim Meeder

As they spoke, my mind started putting the pieces together. This was Laura—the *Laura*—who along with the Meeders—was a key player in helping to form Crystal Peaks and Central Oregon’s horse rescue history. Together, Laura, Kim and Troy, along with other law enforcement officials and organizations, worked to create a roadmap of freedom through a wilderness of uncertainty for horses in need. Through their combined work, hundreds of horses had found redemption and freedom. Today—because of their efforts—the entire landscape of horse rescue has changed for the better.

Mariya and I glanced at each other and smiled. We were both following a pathway of rescue paved by the two committed women before us.

The sweet reunion quietly shifted gears as—once again—the women stood shoulder to shoulder and turned their attention to the dire state of the horses before us. After gulping down long draws of water, the starving pair were beginning to settle in. They were finally safe. The journey of their recovery had begun.

Laura’s radio crackled into life as she received a call to return to duty. As she said her goodbyes, I witnessed something very special. I turned just in time to watch Laura—girded in active duty gear, armed with a handgun at her side and a bullet-proof vest on her chest—reaching around to wrap Kim in a warm embrace.

The officers left for their next assignment and we needed to do the same. We thanked Mariya for the opportunity to consider such a kindhearted equine for our Ranch. I asked if we could arrange for the gelding to visit Crystal Peaks so I could do a test ride. Mariya wholeheartedly agreed—and the evaluation ended as she made her way to care for the new arrivals now under her watch.

On the drive home, our truck was full of excited debriefing. Kim was thrilled to have had a chance to see Laura again. I was elated to finally meet her. If that weren’t enough, we also met a beautiful horse who was finally released for adoption, a horse who needed a new family.

In the truck, I spoke of my thoughts while evaluating the gelding . . . and how he somehow looked familiar.

Suddenly it came to me. “Wait . . .” I questioned Kim, “Wasn’t this the same starving horse we saw when we first toured the Deschutes County Rescue Ranch property?”

She was far ahead of me and nodded with certainty. “Yes, that’s the one.”

“Wow,” I responded. “He looks—and acts—so different. It’s amazing to see him fully recovered. It’s as if he’s ten years younger!”

Shortly after, I completed a riding evaluation and he passed with flying colors. We celebrated all the good work the Sheriff’s Department was doing in the care of these horses and we praised Jesus for answering our prayers to reunite us with them.

On the day of his adoption, Mariya notified two local news stations. Several officers and members of law enforcement came in a mini-brigade. Cameras captured the

story of redemption for a little horse—and—the reinforcement of a twenty five year-old partnership of rescue. Crystal Peaks staff and law enforcement stood shoulder to shoulder in one accord.

Even greater still, the story relayed the Gospel of Christ. The name of Jesus poured through the interviews like a radiant beam of light into our community. Reflecting a war mount carrying a beacon of hope, God positioned the once discarded horse to brandish HIS truth of salvation.

Truly, Jesus had answered our prayers in astounding ways. I was reminded of this verse from Jeremiah: “*This is what the LORD says: ‘Stop at the crossroads and look around. Ask for the old, godly way, and walk in it. Travel its path, and you will find rest for your souls.’*” (Jeremiah 6:16a, NLT)

God had shown us an old, blessed roadway of relationship with the Sheriff’s Department. As we remembered and ventured to repave forgotten friendships—new ones were formed and old ones were strengthened. Additionally, we received a very special horse into our equine team.

In honor of our new gelding’s tenacity to overcome suffering . . . in commemoration of the courageous officers who sacrifice to protect our community . . . and in light of his calling to assist us in the rescue of children in need . . . we named our new horse, “Warrior.”

Warrior stands true to his name and loves the children on the Ranch. He seems to think his ultimate duty is to allow little fingers to brush his now glossy coat and he tenderly bows his head for the smallest hands to reach his face. With bravery, he has carried riders into the wilderness and on one adventure, he even encountered a herd of wild mustangs. Truly, our gentle Warrior lives up to his name.

In a unique way, Warrior reminds us of our Savior. Jesus was despised by men and rejected. He underwent mortal trials—and was raised victorious. He unites those who stand for justice. Humbly, He welcomes the little children. With bravery, He carries His chosen ones through *every* battle.

Our God is the author of Rescue. He offers this gift freely—to *all*—who call on His name.

“The Lord is a warrior; Yahweh is his name.”
(Exodus 15:3, NLT)



Photo credit: Katie Guerrero

Phoenix and Twenty Years of Rescue

BY SARAH ROBINETT
AND KIM MEEDER

This year—2022—is special. It marks two full decades since the most historic horse recovery event in Oregon State history: The Millican Rescue. Twenty years ago the heroic and joint efforts of the Deschutes County Sheriff’s Office and several volunteers changed the entire trajectory of equine rescue within our community. Summoned by Laura, a friend in the Sheriff’s department—Kim and Troy joined a team of those who were first to respond.

Kim Recounts:

It was the winter of 2002. The Millican horse recovery would become the largest equine rescue in Oregon State history.

Walking through unparalleled carnage, my eyes tried to take in what my mind never thought was possible. Evidence of the dead lay scattered in a tangle of dry bones at my feet. Numbness seized my soul as I drifted through the churning herd of more than one hundred and thirty horses.

I glanced at my husband over the sea of serrated spines. His bewildered face was streaked with compassion. No words could describe what stood before him. All he could do was raise his arm and point.

When the tide of ragged coats parted, I nearly fell to my knees. There stood the most ravaged filly I’d ever seen. She was the living dead, a tottering skeleton. Perhaps she would be the next to collapse into oblivion.

On the day of her rescue, we documented the filly as a two-and-a-half-year-old Thoroughbred/Quarter Horse cross. Under normal circumstances, she should have been approximately 16 hands tall and weigh nearly 1,200 pounds. Instead, she stood at barely 13 hands and was estimated by several attending veterinarians to weigh less than 400 pounds. She was missing approximately twelve inches of her normal height and fully two thirds of her body weight.

*(Photos taken after several weeks
of rescue feeding.)*

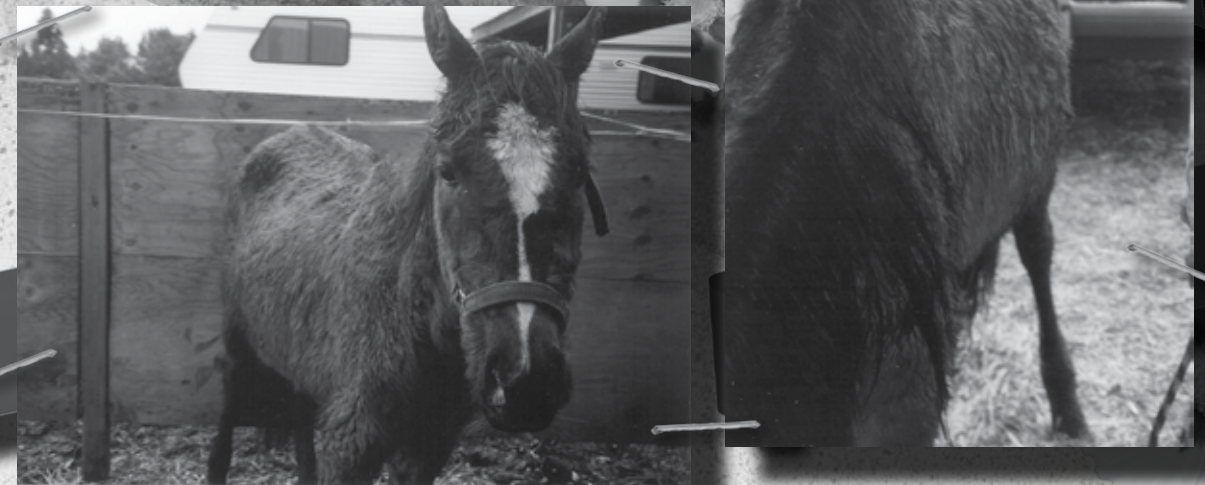


Photo credit for this story: Kim Meeder

Few of her joints seemed to move well. She appeared to be so weakened by starvation that she dared not flex her knees for fear that her atrophied muscles would not hold her up. Wounds on her lips, chest and knees gave silent bloody witness to this truth. She stood very still except when jostled by the shifting herd. When bumped, she steadied herself with legs so stiff that her movement resembled that of a tin man.

In nature's final attempt to save precious body heat, the filly had grown a two-inch layer of lanugo, abnormal "wool" that presents in severe starvation cases. This excess hair was growing into her ears, nostrils and lips. Even still, much of the flesh on her back had frozen and was sloughing off in stinking, necrotic flaps.

I didn't think she would survive the night.

The filly, along with approximately thirty other horses in critical need, was carefully transported to an intensive care facility. The remaining 100 horses were moved to the county fairgrounds, where a team of volunteers treated them.

After many months of care, the starving filly was strong enough to stand in a trailer and travel to her new home at Crystal Peaks. We named her "Phoenix" in honor of her brave little heart that—by the grace of God—rose from the ashes of certain death.

In her first six months at the Ranch, Phoenix, affectionately dubbed "Phoebe" had grown three inches taller and had gained nearly 500 pounds. As her "wool" fell away, an extraordinary horse emerged. The once destitute filly had grown into a beautiful, playful, engaging horse.

We often saw those who spent time with Phoebe leave her corral in silent tears. Some stammered for an explanation of how this young mare had moved them toward their own healing and resolution.

*When appropriate, we shared with kids that if you watch Phoebe—really watch her—you will see a very slight "smile." She is so happy to simply be alive and she continually emanates genuine contentment and good will. (More of Phoebe's story can be read in *Bridge Called Hope*, pages 82-138).*



Sarah's Update:

In the twenty years since her rescue, Phoenix remains one of the dearest and most beloved horses at Crystal Peaks. From traversing mountain trails to tenderly carrying kids on the Ranch, or moving in decorative glory through thousands lining a parade to moving quietly into the heart of a single hurting child or adult . . . Phoebe has done it all. For a horse who was once the weakest, smallest and least likely to survive—God had a plan. No matter what the world tells us our outcome will be—His redemption is *greater*.

When Phoenix was a two-year old in intensive care, God sent someone very special to care for her. Covered with the stench of rotting flesh, open wounds and matted, overgrown winter hair, the emaciated horse was considered unlovely and unwanted by the standards of the world—but *not to Jesus*. Every Wednesday God prompted Kim to take the time to help clean the 30 stalls of all the Millican rescues in intensive care—and then simply spend time with the little "stinky" filly. After months of doing this, a foundation of trust was built. And on that foundation a lifetime of freedom and love still stands strong. Of all the horses at the Ranch, Phoebe is unique in how strongly she bonds with her trusted friends.

Although she is now beyond the age of being ridden and a beautiful part of our veteran herd, I often think of the many rides we shared together in her younger years.

Once she bonded with a rider, her loyalty was astonishing. Despite being blind in one eye, she would instantly respond to every suggestion and direction given by her leader. Many times while riding her, I would simply lay the reins on her neck because they were not needed. Instead, Phoebe felt the shift of my weight and the intention of where I desired to go—and followed without question. It was as if she put actions to my thoughts and made my intentions come to life.

Today, the same loyalty she showed for her riders is displayed in her love and companionship with her herd members and those who care for her daily needs. In a non-coincidental way, Wednesdays continue to be a very special day for Phoenix. It is the day of the week our interns spend extra time grooming our veteran horses. Also non-coincidentally, the Ranch has set aside Wednesday every week as a day of fasting and prayer—a time to seek God’s guidance and direction for all that we face.

When Laura, Kim, Troy and many others stepped forward that frigid winter day twenty years ago, they couldn’t have known . . .

. . . how God would position their brave actions to make national news and lead the way for others to follow. Since the Millican Rescue, hundreds of other equine rescues were founded—both locally and abroad. Deschutes County law enforcement saw the need and purchased property to house confiscated animals for future rescues.

. . . that one tiny, discarded filly would grow into a 15:1 hand mighty mount for the Gospel—and share her story of hope with tens of thousands of hurting hearts.

. . . that when Kim made her weekly Wednesday trips to scoop poop, love an unlovely little horse and spend time prayerfully asking God for wisdom—she couldn’t have known that twenty years later an entire team would follow her example. On Wednesdays we scoop poop, love our elderly veteran horses, fast and continue to ask Jesus for wisdom and guidance.

None of us can know in the moment what God will do with our steps of loving obedience. Today, what small—or seemingly impossible—step is God asking you to take? Are you willing to follow and trust Him for the outcome?

Phoebe has set a great example. When she was offered freedom, she chose to walk forward in trust and healing. When ridden, she would bring to life her rider’s every thought. Now she trusts her leaders—even in her blindness—with unwavering devotion.

Like Phoebe, will you choose to receive the freedom and the healing offered to you by Jesus Christ? Will you allow His Holy Spirit to fill you and guide you? Are you willing to bring Jesus’ thoughts and truth to life through your actions? Will you trust and follow His gentle guidance, even when you cannot see the outcome?

A life of freedom and love is built one faithful step at a time. Take heart friend, Jesus is able to do beyond all you can ask or imagine. (Eph. 3:20) And He does mighty works through willing hearts.

“FOR WE WALK BY FAITH, NOT BY SIGHT.”

2 CORINTHIANS 5:7 (ESV)



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LAST CHANCE TRADING POST UPDATE



Photo credit: Wendy Moore

Hey everyone, we're excited to share new merchandise added to our gift store. We're especially moved by the recent design drawn by Kim of the glorious Three Sisters Mountains, as seen from the Ranch. We have a fresh t-shirt design for both men and women. Our quarter zip long sleeve and new beanie all include unique versions of the new artwork. We are also mixing things up with some fun color changes for all of our sweatshirts!

Through purchasing our merchandise for yourself or a friend, you are helping to support this ministry in two primary ways: 1—Your purchase directly supports our program financially. 2—Every time you wear, display or gift one of our products you effectively help to spread the message of hope.

We trust you will enjoy these new colors and designs created especially for you. Check out our new items in full color and the heart behind them at: www.crystalpeakseyouthranch.org/store/

All stories written in "Around the Fire" newsletter are true. Some of the names have been changed to protect individual privacy. "Around the Fire" newsletter stands on the Word of God. Multiple translations of the Holy Bible are used to assure clarity for our readership. Each author is afforded the right to choose the translation that best suits their submission.