



AROUND *the* FIRE

NEWS FROM CRYSTAL PEAKS YOUTH RANCH

FALL 2008

Perspective

BY KIM MEEDER

In all my years, I had never seen anything like it before. All I could do was simply stare in complete wonder. As Troy and I drove home from a dinner meeting the night before our June Information Clinic, I took in the evening brilliance. Lit by the fiery colors of sunset, a single cloud covered nearly a quarter of the sky. Its shape clearly resembled that of a mighty, flying warrior. Its hair, wings and cloak were all flowing back, driven by an unseen jet stream. Yet, what defied the laws of nature, were its arms, they were held out in a great crescent... directly over our ranch.

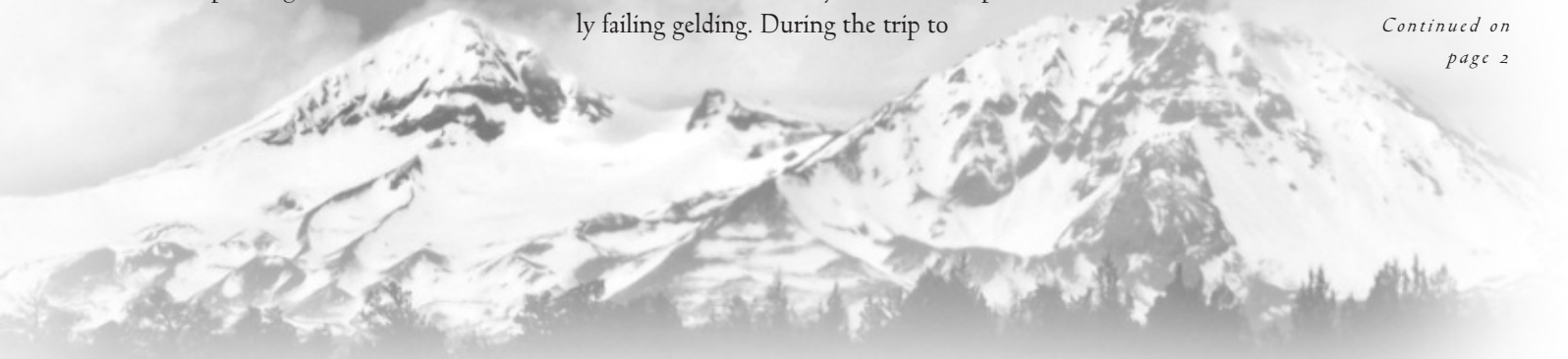
I pointed out this wondrous sight to Troy as we drove over the Tumalo rim leading down toward the Deschutes River. I couldn't take my eyes off this remarkable sight. Scripture streamed through my mind of all the times mighty Cherubim visited mere mortals. They came for protection, instruction, encouragement and comfort. While reveling with Troy in its astonishing beauty, I could feel a great chill coming over my heart. Something terrible was on my horizon and I intuitively knew that this great sight was a visual reminder for me to hold fast, to literally see that I am not alone and KNOW and REST in the fact that God IS in control. I shared all that my heart held with Troy... except my sense of impending dread.

By the time we reached the ranch, it was late and everyone should have been home preparing for the inhuman amount of work the next few days would bring. Instead, we were met by several of the ranch staff who began to spill out the frightening events of the evening. One of our horses was showing signs of rapid and severe colic.

While Troy turned our truck around to go and hitch up the trailer, I walked out into the darkened corral to assess his symptoms. It was Syngin, my beloved friend. The staff's alarm was justified, he was indeed suffering from colic. My mind reeled in simultaneous fast forward and reverse. The on-call vet was quickly summoned to meet us at the clinic while we anxiously loaded our rapidly failing gelding. During the trip to



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the clinic, I couldn't help but remember a similar trip nearly a year to the day previous.

A year earlier, Syngin had suffered with a colic that came on so rapidly and forcefully that every medical application we tried had virtually no effect. Troy and I were sent home with dozens of IV fluid bags and several vials of equine pain killer. After our staff went home, Troy and I decided that since I am the family 'night owl', I would take the first watch. By 3:00 a.m., Syngin's makeshift hospital room lay strewn with empty IV bags, vet wrap, Elasticon and empty pain medication vials. Nothing had any effect. By that time, his pain level was so high that he was tearing his stall apart in the throes of his agony.

He was dying and I knew it. I made the decision that if this were to be his last night, then he should be allowed the dignity to live it his own way. I carefully unhooked both of his jugular catheters, haltered another gelding who was his best friend and led Syngin into our arena to spend his last remaining moments together with Remnant and me. Because he was far beyond medical help, I let him do whatever he chose: run, buck, roll, groan, stretch. Yet, for nearly the entire next few hours, he chose to walk directly behind me and rest his head on my shoulder. I prayed for him, sang worship songs and even passively played a few of his favorite 'hide and seek' games.

Finally, he laid down. I knelt with him and said everything that I wanted him to know before he left this life. Then, I prayed for him one last time. This time, instead of rolling onto his side and groaning and pawing in pain, he laid peacefully upright on his sternum.

That was the moment that I knew God was doing something extraordinary. By the time Troy came down at 5:00 a.m., Syngin was resting quietly with Remnant. He was recovering.

My mind yanked back to the present as I felt Syngin's painful thrashing rock the trailer behind us. By the time we pulled into the vet clinic, I knew why I had seen the extraordinary cloud. I knew that my precious Syngin should have died a year ago and this past bit of time was not only a gift, but also a season to prepare my heart to finally say 'goodbye'.

As before, Syngin's symptoms were beyond our vets ability to treat him. The best he could offer was to simply manage his pain, which had little effect. Yet, unlike before, our vet did a quick battery of tests which all pointed to the fact that Syngin could be a good surgical candidate. It was a massive procedure that they did not offer... but another equine hospital did. This was something

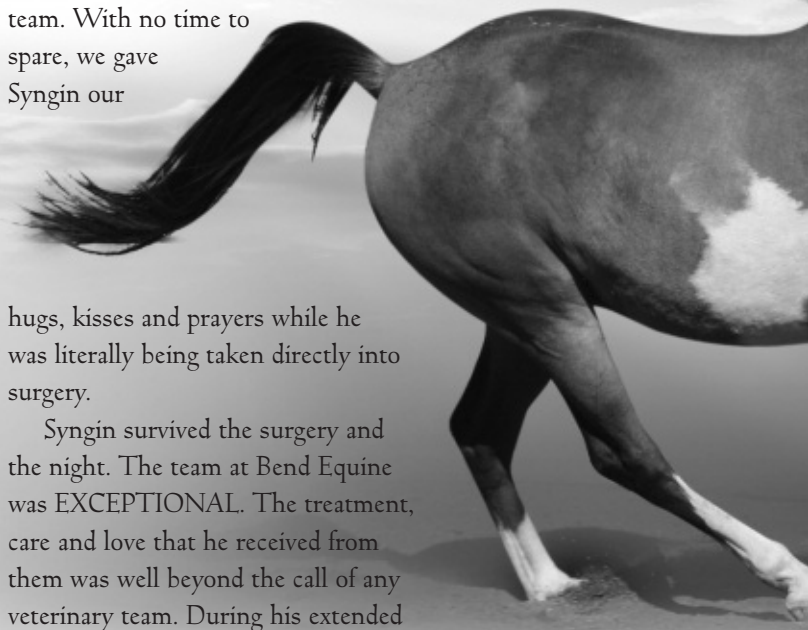


that I never thought I would choose to put a horse through. Yet, how could I say no if there was still hope for my friend?

After a quick prayer in the cab of the truck, we opted to take him to Bend Equine, the only equine hospital in all of Central Oregon. Upon our arrival, we were immediately received by what looked and felt like a 'special ops' medical team. With no time to spare, we gave Syngin our

hugs, kisses and prayers while he was literally being taken directly into surgery.

Syngin survived the surgery and the night. The team at Bend Equine was EXCEPTIONAL. The treatment, care and love that he received from them was well beyond the call of any veterinary team. During his extended recovery, Syngin was quietly visited with



nearly around the clock visitors. Every man, woman and child brought their own unique brand of love and good will. Soon, the outside of his intensive care room was papered with 'Get Well' cards made from the little hands of those who his extraordinary life had touched. One mother, with careful preparation for what her young son would see, brought him to the Hospital to visit his 'best friend'. After a few moments of a small boy whispering into a sick horse's ear, the mother and son returned to their car. Before starting the engine, the mother asked her son, "Did you get to say everything that you wanted to?" The child replied, "Yup, he knows that I love him. I told him that I didn't mind the scars on the outside... it's the inside that I love."

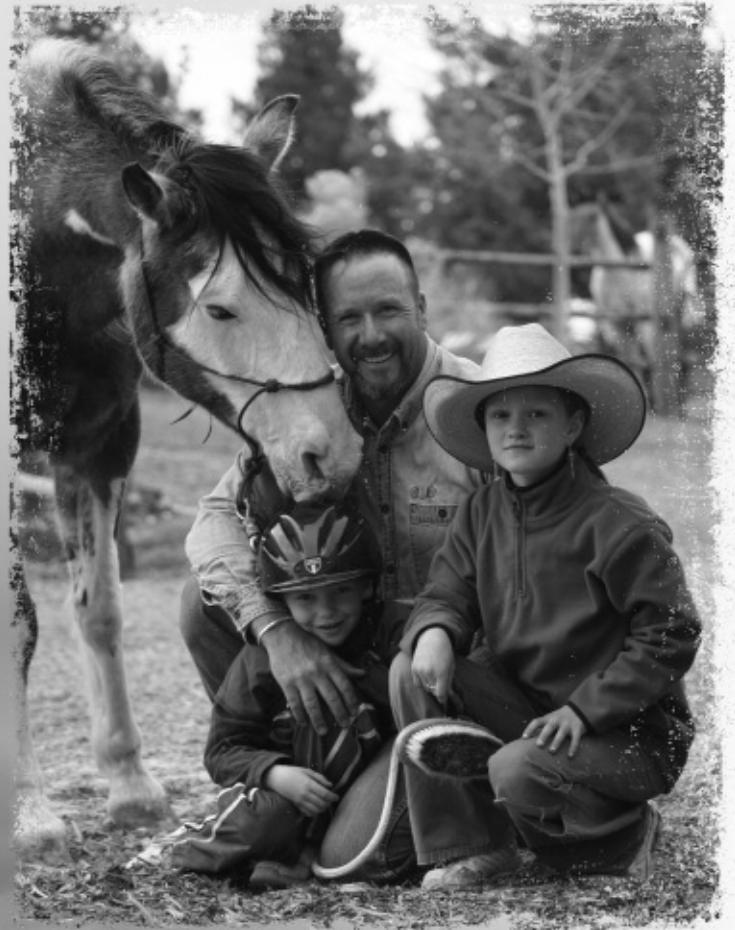
Syngin's surgery was a success and his healing was gaining momentum. It was his genetically 'thin' body wall that postoperatively posed his greatest threat. After two weeks of meaningful recovery, Syngin's abdominal staples finally failed. I will never forget the moment of hearing the news that my treasured Friend's life was ended by an emergency euthanasia.

Within the choking crush of grief and sorrow that gripped the ranch, swirled all the age old questions, "Why God? Why did you not answer the prayers of Your children? Why would You allow such suffering? Why did You not heal him when You have complete power to do so? Why? Why? Why?"

It was not until the aftermath that followed that gentle answers began to fill my heart, "Child, I am the same yesterday, today and forever. My love knows no end. I am the God of justice, mercy and peace. If the picture that you see seems unfair or unbalanced... it is simply because your perspective is so limited. You do not see the *whole* picture as I do, you see only an infinitesimal sliver. The real question was never 'Why?'... but 'Will you?' 'Will you trust ME with the rest of the picture that you do not see? Will you still choose to trust Me? Will you choose to rest in My justice, mercy and peace... even when you cannot see the balance of how it applies to your sorrow and grief?"

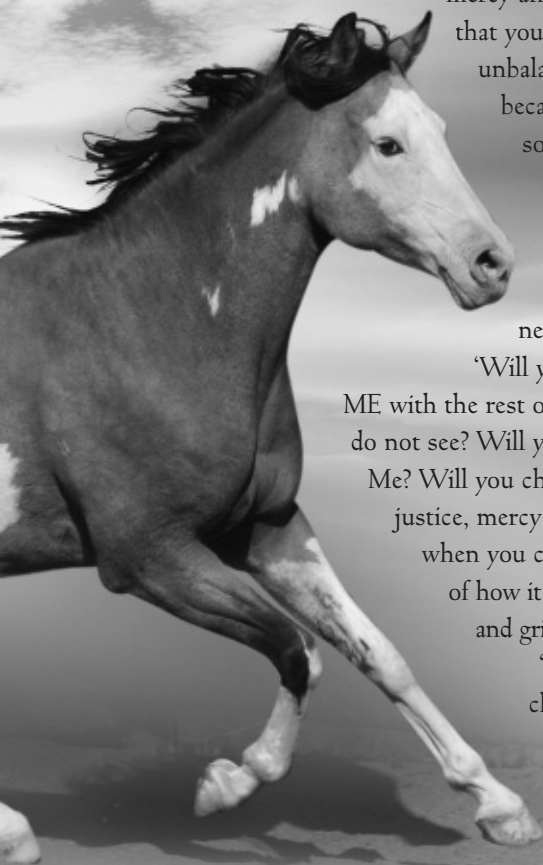
"My child, will you choose to 'be still and KNOW that I AM God'... will you choose to rest in MY perspective?"

In the short time since Syngin's death, I can already see bits and pieces of God's perfect will being played out in those who loved this treasured horse. I'm slowly understanding that God's perfect will is just that... perfect. In our times of sorrow, I now realize that we can choose to bow to the 'Maker of the Stars', to submit our will to His. To rest in the fact that, even if we don't see it right away, His plan is perfect.



Because the final book in the Bible tells us that Jesus returns on a horse, I know that horses ARE in Heaven. So, clearly God thinks that horses are pretty special too. I will rest in this fact and I will trust in my Lords plan, for all of the 'seen' and 'unseen' parts. And, until that day when I see my sweet Syngin face to face and take in his amazing scent, I will daydream about playing 'hide and seek' with him once again.

Syngin
2000-2008



It's All Right... I Am Here... **DO NOT BE AFRAID**

BY TROY MEEDER

"Are you ready?"

"YES!" I shouted back through the gale.

Scott, my instructor, answered with typical military enthusiasm, "Outstanding, Meeder!"

The wind was screaming through the open door of the small Cessna 182. Our pilot pulled back on the control yoke, which started the slow accent into a 'powered stall'. With the aircraft in the perfect position for us to jump, while strapped together, Scott and I awkwardly moved towards the open door. As we approached our push off point, Scott methodically went through his safety checklist of tightening all straps, buckles and equipment.

It was during this time that I became so keenly aware that I was not alone in this crazy, life changing event. Scott was strapped so tightly to me that we nearly moved as one person. My first glimpse outside the door was staggering. We were two miles above the earth, traveling over 100 mph and—by choice—getting ready to jump out of a perfectly good airplane. I never dreamed that on a day such as this, I

would be skydiving for the very first time.

Our jump protocol was simple: Ready... Set... ARCH! On the word 'arch', with simple matching movements, we would leave the relative safety of the airplane and jump into the nothingness of flight.

As we stepped out together onto the platform above the landing gear, Scott yelled into my ear, "ARE YOU READY TO FLY?"

"YES! LET'S DO IT!" I enthusiastically replied.

"OUTSTANDING!" Scott answered.

Looking down, I could see the postage stamp-sized airfield that we had just left. It seemed to reach out and pull us from the airplane. With Mount Hood to the east and Portland to the west, we pushed off the known... into the unknown. Thanks to Scott's amazing preflight training that he taught me earlier in the day, I instantly assumed the proper position for flight.

The wind howled passed us as we careened toward earth. WHAT A COMPLETE RUSH!!! Kim said later that she could hear me screaming, enjoying the ride, from the ground! Because of

moments like this, it never ceases to amaze me how a 48 year old man can instantly become the crazy, careless 10 year old kid that he once was.

I grinned as I thought to myself, 'So THIS is what it feels like to fall at 140 mph!' Hurricane force winds ripped at us

as we plummeted towards our earthly home. At 7,000 feet, Scott patted me on the head as a warning to brace for the severe jolt of the opening chute. BAM! I nearly felt as if my legs might be yanked off from the impact of our parachute popping open. What a remarkable difference. It hardly felt like the same trip to go from the screaming winds of free fall to the gentle sway of parachute assisted flight. While drifting down to earth, I realized that this short time in the sky would, forever, etch life long memories.

With the air field fast approaching, we had one more 'critical hurdle' to cross... the landing.

Earlier, Scott had been very clear that the vast majority of injuries occur not in the free fall, but the potentially bone crushing meeting with the ground. 'Makes sense,' I thought with a twinge of anxiety.

As we began to circle our landing zone, Scott's instructions to me were simple, "Lift your legs and feet and on my cue, place them on the ground at the very last second."

'OK... sounds easy. Even an old cowboy can remember that,' I thought as I eyed the ground. While slowly circling the airfield, Scott gave me the 'legs up' command. With my legs and feet held straight out, I strained to hold my position.

At the very last instant, Scott shouted, "FEET DOWN!" With the same ease as stepping down from my truck, we came to a gentle rest in the center of a graveled circle known as the skydiver's 'Bulls Eye'.

It was a perfect landing! Hoots and hollers rose all around me as my staff... my family, came running to greet their 'Papa T'. Hugs and congratulations were given by all. During the mayhem,



I couldn't help but ponder what a truly blessed man I am to share my life with this incredible group of young people.

As I walked off the airfield, filled with the rush of accomplishment and the incredible feeling of life at its fullest, I was gently reminded by our Awesome Lord that, "Troy... you are never alone. Within this amazing journey, I am just like Scott. As you jump into life and all of its adventures, trials, joys and sorrows, I am with you... always."

I knew that as I jumped from the relative safety of that rickety old airplane,

I was going to be okay. Simply because Scott was with me; we were strapped together. I had full knowledge that Scott was a professional. He was someone that had gone before me, countless times.

He knew what was coming and he knew how to handle it. He understood that if I could just trust him through my fear, that we would experience something incredible... together.

Life is that way. Daily, we must choose to leave the security of our home and jump out into the unknown of the day.

Surrounded by all of life's challenges, surprises and storms,

we get to choose to embrace the life that God has planned for us. We choose to trust Him to guide us through... or we stay in the 'plane' and never know the thrill of accomplishing something incredible... together. Our Savior calls us to jump into life, trusting that He is in control. That He is with us. He has gone before us and knows what to expect.

In Matthew 14:27, Jesus calms his terrified disciples by gently saying to them, "It's all right... I am here... don't be afraid."

In those simple words, Jesus reminds us of three life giving truths: everything is all right, He is always with us and not to be afraid. In life, there will be times for every one of us to feel as though we are alone. All of us will struggle with the constant attacks from the enemy. All of us will grapple with the feelings that we are alone and without hope. All of us will come to those thresholds of being afraid. Yet, Jesus has gone before us. He promises that, as believers, we are *never* alone. He promises that He is at our side every moment of every day. He promises that within this journey we call life, we have a choice to make...

we can either choose to take it with Him or without Him.

Dear friends, as you prepare to jump into each day, remember that our Lord has gone before us. He knows what to expect and He knows how to handle it. He is in control, He is always with us and when we are 'strapped' to Him, we have nothing to fear. His 'flight plan' is perfect and when we choose to 'jump' with Him... we will have an OUTSTANDING flight!

Each day as you jump into the unknown of life, let God's Word be your parachute... it's all right... I am here... don't be afraid.



A FALSE FORTRESS

BY RACHEL HANSON-MCBRIDE



do this as a result of experiencing extreme circumstances. Instead of becoming over active and flighty, which is the tendency of most equines, a few will choose to retreat deep within themselves. Somewhere inside their soul, they find solace, a place where they can more easily manage the stress of their life. This tendency can become a routine

Sometimes the simple message that resonates from the life of a horse impacts us more deeply than that which comes from the life of a man.

About a year ago, a little horse joined our ranch. As a staff, we were amazed at how quiet he was. He never made a fuss about anything. 'Mateo' moved slowly everywhere, carrying his head low. Though we were so excited to have this small rescued horse with us, there was an unmistakable 'vacancy' in his eyes. The cherished emotional connection between horse and human was not easy to find with Mateo. Even in the paddock with the other horses, Mateo chose to stand alone.

At the Ranch, I have been taught that some horses

quite quickly, a habit that is hard to break.

A few days ago, I found myself frustrated with our lonely little boy. After all, he has been offered nothing short of a horse paradise, yet his progress from his chosen state of isolation has been ever-so-slow. He is continually surrounded by many people whose favorite activity is to shower love and affection on the



nearest four legged friend. So, why would this small horse keep choosing to retreat into the confines of his own head? Why would he continue clinging to whatever was in his past instead of fully enjoying the present? Why, when friends are available all around, would he choose instead to be by himself? There were so many questions to contemplate...

In the next moment, an even deeper question rose in my heart. Softly, and yet so clearly, the words came into my head, "Child, *why do you?*"

"Why DO I?" I thought. "Why do I hide deep inside my mind?"

I am no different than Mateo. My reasons for pulling away are no more justified or reasonable. What benefit is there for me to hide inside my own head? The truth is, there is NO benefit.

The relief from pain promised by solitude is—quite simply—just a lie.

Pain from the past has a way of holding onto us.

Yet, we have a choice. Each day we can continue to escape to our old place of comfort. The road to our familiar 'fortress' of safety is well-worn and easy to follow. However, every hurt in my life has led me to one truth. There is only ONE safe place in this world. That one safe place is found walking hand-in-hand with Christ.

Fortresses of false safety are many, my false fortress was solitude. What's yours?

I have learned that sometimes the simple message that resonates from the life of a horse... impacts us more deeply than that which comes from the life of a man.

Yes! I would like to help Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch fulfill their mission

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MY FAVORITE PLACE...

BY JULIANNA, AGE 10



My favorite place is a place bountiful in fun, a place where love and laughter is shared with everyone!

You're greeted with a hug and a smile and asked if you can stay a while.

Boy, this place is fun! You can watch horses run! Or you can ride them!

Riding is such a wonderful thing; it feels like you've taken wing.

Higher than the trees,
higher than the skies,
"The sky is the limit."
Horses don't tell lies.

This place is meant for everyone. That's one reason why I think it is so fun!

These are all reasons why I think Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch is my favorite place.



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