

AROUND the FIRE

SUMMER 2015

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

Joy MY NEW FAVORITE GEAR

BY KIM MEEDER

At seven years of age, Milly had already experienced a hard life. For most of her short years, she'd lived in a car instead of a home. She'd slept on a seat instead of a bed. Often, she went without the necessities of a normal child's life, including food.

I watched her study the ranch. Her sky blue eyes were cautious, measuring, as if there was a 'catch' to being able to ride horses for free. She was beautiful in a tousled, tough, tomboy sort of way. Zip, Troy's blue heeler pup came over and licked her hand. She squealed and pulled her hand away and started laughing.

That's when I saw the sweetest array of teeth in transition. Each tooth seemed to have a mind of its own, going in every direction. Most were small and deciduous, some were large and permanent, all pushed together to find their place in her engaging smile.

After we finished our chore of cleaning up a

flowerbed, it was time to pick a horse. From the beginning, she was clear that she was not afraid and wanted to ride the biggest horse on the ranch. Together, we

made our way toward Little Bear, a 16½ hand, 1600 pound draft-cross gelding. As we drew near him, he lowered his head to smell her. Instantly, I couldn't help

but notice the size contrast between her tiny body and his massive head.

Once we'd secured him to the hitching post, we began the grooming process. He was so tall that I had to hoist her up onto my hip so she could reach his mane to brush it tangle free. I held up each dinner-plate-sized hoof for her to fearlessly clean. Soon, her tiny saddle was snugged into place. It was so small that it looked like a bump on a pickle!

With great care, I assisted small rider and giant horse into the round pen. I wanted to show my new young friend something very special. I briefly explained how horses think, herd dynamics and the fact that they cannot lie... horses can ONLY tell the truth.

Continued on page 2



Photo: Kim Meeder

“Joy is the serious business of Heaven.”

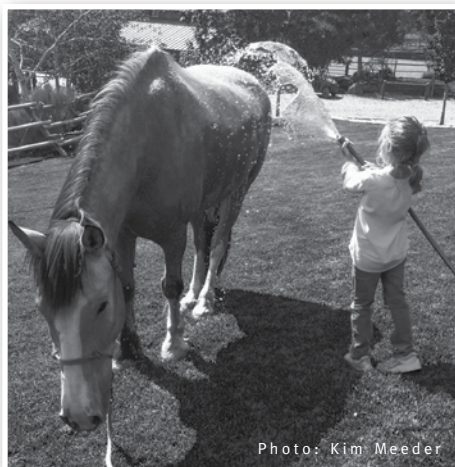
~ C. S. Lewis

“So Milly, now that he’s completely loose and can go anywhere he wants, let’s see where he *wants* to go. Let’s see what he wants to say about you.”

Little Bear completed several trotting laps and immediately began to display all the cues of friendship that I’d instructed her to watch for. In no time, he turned to face her, lowered his head and licked his lips repeatedly. “Milly, he’s asking you to invite him to be your friend. Do you want him to be your friend?” She looked up at me and answered with a simple nodding, “Uh-huh.”

Gently maneuvering Milly from behind, I helped her communicate to the massive horse that it was okay for him to come into her inner circle. Once he was standing in front of her, I asked Milly to rub him with both of her hands on his face and shoulders. Slowly, I backed away. “Milly, now walk away from him.” Like a little soldier, she turned from the horse and marched toward the round pen wall. “STOP!” She froze. “Now, where’s Little Bear?” I prompted. Turning to look for him, she smiled a great toothy grin, “He’s RIGHT behind me!” “Why do you think he’s right behind you?” I asked. She looked up at him thoughtfully and put her hand on his muzzle. “Because... because... because... *he likes me!*”

“YES! Remember, he’s loose. He can go anywhere he wants to... and he wants to



be with YOU! He does LIKE you!” Once again, her toothy grin split my universe with pure delight. Seeming to declare to herself, she repeated, “He likes me! He likes ME!”

“He does like YOU. He’s telling you that you’re very special. Do you believe him? Do you *know* how special you are?” She looked at my face. Her expression seemed to ponder if this was somehow a trick question. I answered for her with a smile and a wink, “You know... you ARE.”

Next, she was on his back and learning the basics of how to ride a horse. It became instantly clear that she was—indeed—fearless. “Faster, can he go faster?” Not knowing when I might see her again, I obliged her request. By putting Little Bear on a lunge line, I had complete control of his direction and speed. With a few simple

instructions for Milly, the three of us together set out to ‘go faster.’

Milly’s job was to hold onto the saddle, my job was to steer the horse and Little Bear’s job was to trot in soft circles around me. Once the giant gelding started to trot, it was instantaneous, Milly began to giggle. The bigger his trot, the bigger her giggle! Soon, Milly’s giggling grew into full-blown laughter. Each stride seemed to crush an unseen stronghold and inspire something inexplicable—a release of long overdue... joy.

My young friend’s laughter could not be contained; it grew into full-blown little girl guffaws! I was helpless to not laugh with her! Finally, I asked Little Bear to slow down to a walk and then turn toward me.

Milly and I were now face to face. I could see that her cheeks were flushed from the rush of emotion. Still laughing a bit, I asked her, “What do you think? Even from my distance I could see her eyes twinkling with excitement. Then, she nearly shouted, “I just LOVE TROTTLING! TROTTLING is my NEW FAVORITE GEAR!”

“Always be full of joy in the Lord.

I say it again—REJOICE!”

(Phil. 4:4 NLT).



PEACE IN THE PROCESS

BY KAREN DOWNER

Isaac came to Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch in 2009. The beautiful palomino gelding had suffered a history of abuse and survived a serious trailer loading accident that crushed in the bones of his face. With the help of the wonderful doctors at Bend Equine Medical Center, his face was surgically repaired and he was restored to physical health.



Photo: Katie Jacobsen

Isaac has visible scars from his traumatic experience. He also bears deep emotional wounds that can cause him to react in fear. Although he's come a long way in his healing process, Isaac still has 'triggers' that create unpredictable responses.

When Isaac first came to the ranch, he was unapproachable. If you looked his way he'd turn his head and move his shoulders away, as if to say, "Please leave me alone, I don't trust you." Our staff and volunteers invested time in the paddock with him, quietly building a bridge of trust. By asking nothing in return, over time, Isaac allowed them to approach, touch and pet him.

It's been a slow, steady process but now he stands quietly for anyone to catch and care for him.

As staff members, we each have huge hearts to mentor the children *and* horses that come to the ranch. We put a great deal of time, care and patience into helping our horses grow through their past ordeals. As they recover, they can become a healthy and balanced part of our session program. God uses the testimonies of our horses' healing process to impact the lives of children and families that come to the ranch.

God has personally given me a great desire to help both people and horses overcome fear and gain trust. So, when I was given the opportunity to spend consistent time with Isaac, I was very excited. I reviewed various training articles and pulled together a 'toolbox' of triggers. These were items that would challenge him, such as plastic bags, pool noodles and ropes. By using them safely, Isaac was encouraged to overcome and release triggers from his past traumas.

Many times when we work with horses, we begin in the round-pen to develop trust. As they move freely in circles around us, we ask them to change their pace and direction. We constantly look for signs of submission and then ask them to join-up with us in the center of the pen. If they're fearful or guarded, they'll choose not to connect with us. But when they do submit and desire to draw into the center of the round-pen with us, they find rest and peace. This reminds me of Matthew 11:28, where Jesus says "Come to Me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (NIV)

Once I established a trusting

relationship with Isaac during sessions, I brought out 'triggers' from my bag. My goal wasn't to overwhelm him. Rather, I wanted him to learn that he could trust me to not put him in a harmful situation and together we could investigate the frightening 'trigger'.

Likewise, our Heavenly Father doesn't force us to change, but He does encourage us to fully identify

what triggers our fear—and to grow *through* it. Often, this is a lengthy process of surrendering our hurts and wounds that cause us to *over-react*.

I've been learning as well. When faced with trials, I have to intentionally keep my eyes on Jesus and ask Him to help me through difficult times. I understand I need to forgive quickly, live in the moment as horses do, and not focus on past hurts. God's ability to transform my heart is quickened, when I *choose to surrender* my fear, grief, anger or bitterness. I'm applying the truth of 1 Peter 5:7 where God calls me to cast all my anxiety on Him because He cares for me.

My goal is to teach Isaac what I've been learning in life. I want him to refocus his attention away from the pain of the past and learn to trust me in all situations. Psalm 141:8 (NIV) says, "But my eyes are fixed on You, O Sovereign Lord; in You I take refuge—do not give me over to death."

Isaac is learning to trust. He exhibits such joy and peace, as he chooses to *release* his fear.

Continued on page 4



Recently, I was working on building Isaac's confidence with our giant soccer ball. This ball frightened him. Each time I work with him, I encourage him to draw near the ball, then praise him and give him a rest. If he chooses not to trust, I gently ask him to go out to the rail and calmly move his feet. This helps him make the choice to rest *with* me at the ball.



Because we'd been making progress and gaining confidence, I added a new 'trigger', which was a large plastic bag. The moment he saw the bag, he reacted in fear and ran around the arena.

Once again, I tried to draw him in to investigate the scary plastic bag. However, it was just too much for him to process at that time.

Isaac was free to choose and I respected his choice. Just then, something very interesting happened. As I was standing near the plastic bag, he chose to join-up to the previously 'scary' soccer ball that rested several feet away from me.

My equine friend was at peace as he stood at the ball, even nuzzling it! His demeanor indicated that he was tired of running from his fear!

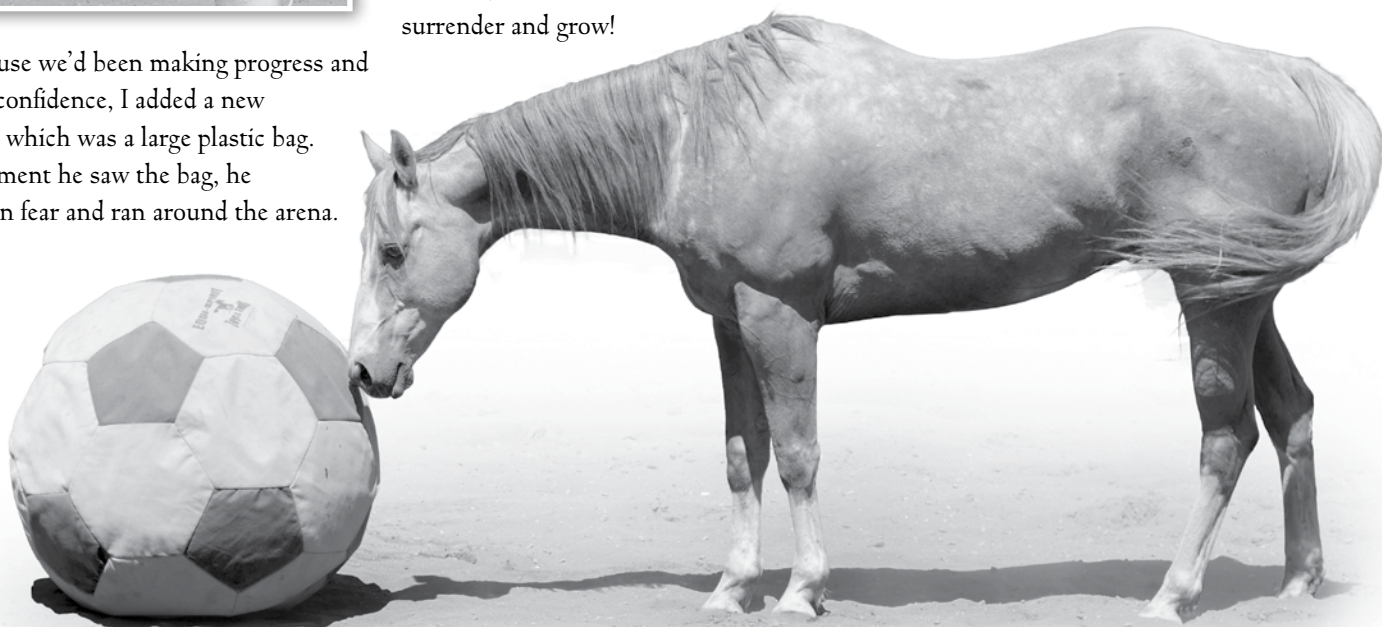
On that day, Isaac chose to trust. He demonstrated a sincere desire to TRY, to move past his trauma. I'm so proud of him, as I know my Heavenly Father is pleased with me, when I choose to surrender and grow!

This precious horse is learning to trust in new ways. Day by day he's surrendering his fears. Isaac is such an example of hope. As he grows, I've seen the Lord use him in unique ways here at Crystal Peaks.

Because of Isaac's example, I'm led to encourage you to surrender your own brokenness to Jesus. Don't give up hope in the situations you face, because HE is able to heal and restore. When you choose to trust the Lord with your hurts—like Isaac—you will find PEACE in the healing process.



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Photos: Katie Jacobsen

CHOOSE JOY

BY KIM MEEDER

Winsome brown eyes danced in the early morning sun. “Amos,” our most recently rescue colt stood next to Brad within the Ranch entrance. It was the Leadership Conference and the participants were just starting to make their way up the hill. Brad and Amos were the official ‘greeters’ and I was there to assist in welcoming all our guests.

I watched Amos intently. Brad had groomed him to gleaming and had fitted him with a tiny child’s saddle. At 14 months of age, I couldn’t help but think that the eager expression on his kind chestnut face combined with his small saddle—made him look like a little boy scout going on his first campout.

Amos was fixated on the cars that were pulling in. Every time he saw someone emerge from their vehicle, his ears would perk up, he’d raise his head and whinny a greeting to our new arrivals. In all my life, I’ve never seen a horse—young or old—do this to complete strangers. I was fascinated. What would inspire a colt to do this?

His history gave no clues. Rejected and nearly killed at birth by his mother, Amos was removed from her side and placed at a nearby goat farm. From his mother he didn’t receive kindness, nurturing, protection or love. From his equine ‘family,’ he received nothing but harm. He was rebuffed and abandoned, then dropped amongst those who weren’t his kind and left to forge a new life. What did he have to be happy about?

From a human perspective, this horse should’ve been depressed, introverted, a loner, emotionally caved in. Most would nod in agreement that he *should* feel that way. He has a *right* to feel that way. Look at how hard his life has been—poor soul, no wonder he’s so depressed. Who can blame

him for his negative actions and behavior?

Yet, I watched in wonder as the red colt before me was NONE of those things. Our guests were incredulous. “Is he whinnying at *me*? How did you teach him to do that?” they marveled. Throughout the morning Brad’s repeated reply was accompanied by the same sweet smile, “We didn’t. He’s just HAPPY!”

Listening to Brad speak this truth over and over, I couldn’t help but wonder, *are we?* Are we *choosing* happiness despite the hardships of our past? Or, are we kneeling to the idol of our ‘feelings’ and choosing to bow before their every changing whim? Even though our hurtful events are behind us, are we allowing our past to taint, harm, even destroy our present?

It’s a true statement, everyone comes from somewhere and everyone’s been through something. Each one of us has a long list of all the heartaches and pain of the past—and—each one of us must choose if we want our past to DESTROY us or DEFINE us.

Simply watching a kind red colt welcome and reach for every guest who came his way made me consider ‘if a horse appears to understand this concept... why don’t people?’ If a horse can choose to not focus on all he’s lost—but instead—on all he can DO... wouldn’t it make sense that people could choose to do the same thing?

“Always be full of joy in the Lord, I say it again—rejoice! Let every-

one see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon. Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need. And thank Him for all He has done. If you do this, you will experience God’s PEACE, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 4:4-7 NLT).

Holding fast to the peace of Jesus and the sweet inspiration of a little red horse—on this day—I choose joy.

Every minute of every day ALL of us can choose to worry about *nothing*, pray about *everything* and allow the all consuming PEACE of Jesus to guard our hearts.

Because of what Christ has done for all—dying on a cross, raising again and breaking the grip of our sin—when you choose Jesus OVER your past and present circumstances... you choose JOY.



Photo: Kim Meeder

RIGHTEOUSNESS IS A CHOICE

BY JEFF WOODFORD

Recently, Crystal Peaks gained two new young colts. Forrest was born on the ranch. His mother, Shamis, is an instrumental part of our session program and a proven sweet-hearted, willing teacher of many new riders.

The other colt is a rescued orphaned we named Amos. We were told this little guy's mother nearly trampled him just after birth, regretfully requiring immediate separation. Rejected and in desperate need of his mother's life-giving milk, his owners sought help from some friends who raise goats. The friends ended up raising him on goat's milk and, to everyone's surprise, Amos (then called "Lucky") survived.

Last fall, the kind souls who faithfully bottle-fed little Amos for the first 5 months of his life, called Crystal Peaks. They realized the young colt needed a more horse-suitable home.

Recently, while reading in Ezekiel, God presented a clear and applicable picture comparing our two new colts. After reading the verses several times over, clarity came as to how the stories of our new equine arrivals paralleled what Ezekiel heard from God:

"... 'The righteousness of the righteous man will not save him when he disobeys, and the wickedness of the wicked man will not cause him to fall when he turns from it. The righteous man, if he sins, will not be allowed to live because of his former righteousness.'

If I tell the righteous man that he will surely live, but then he trusts in his righteousness and does evil, none of the righteous things he has done will be remembered; he will die for the evil he has done. And if I say to the wicked man, 'You will surely die,' but he then turns away from his sin and does what is just and right — if he gives back what he took in pledge for a loan, returns what he has stolen, follows the decrees that give life, and does no evil, he will surely live; he will not die. None of the sins he has committed will be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right; he will surely live." — Ezekiel 33:12-16 (NIV)

Please be aware, the way my brain works is to compare the truth of scripture to things I experience and then to lessons I'm currently

learning in horsemanship. What God showed me in this passage was that Forrest's life (the colt who was born here on the ranch) is 'like' the righteous man. His 'righteousness' is represented by the nutritional and emotional health of his upbringing. From his first day, he's been raised on his mother's healthy milk and under her loving and watchful eye.

Amos' life (the rescued orphan colt) is 'like' the wicked man. He was raised outside of a loving equine environment on goat's milk. Please understand, I'm not implying that Amos is wicked. The application God showed me was merely a comparison of the *environment* in which each horse spent his first few months.

Although Amos received loving attention several times a day—goat's milk can never replace that of a mare's. Nor can any person—no matter how well intended—replicate the love and discipline that a colt's own mother would provide.

Referring back to Ezekiel, neither the wicked man nor the righteous man is necessarily STUCK in that place simply because of how he *lived before*. In the same way, neither horse will either succeed or fail throughout his life based on his *initial upbringing*.

Upon his arrival, Amos was weaned off goat milk. Instantly, his health reacted negatively. His digestive system was used to goat milk and not a grass hay diet, which is necessary for a horse his age. His body was literally rejecting the best and most natural nutrition for it! But, like the wicked man who "turns away from his sin and does what is just and right," Amos pushed through his 'wicked' circumstances and is now thriving. His young body is catching up and filling out with healthy levels of muscle and fat. Amos is now part of a herd, essential to the emotional growth of any horse. He's in training and has proven to be a calm and willing study, quick to learn and eager to please.

In contrast, Forrest had few physical struggles since birth and has been set up for success. Currently, both colts are nearing the same threshold in their upbringing and training. This brings us to a crucial point.

As the staff begins to work more and more with Forrest and Amos, each horse has important choices to make. They can welcome the challenges we offer in order to help them grow mentally and physically—or—they

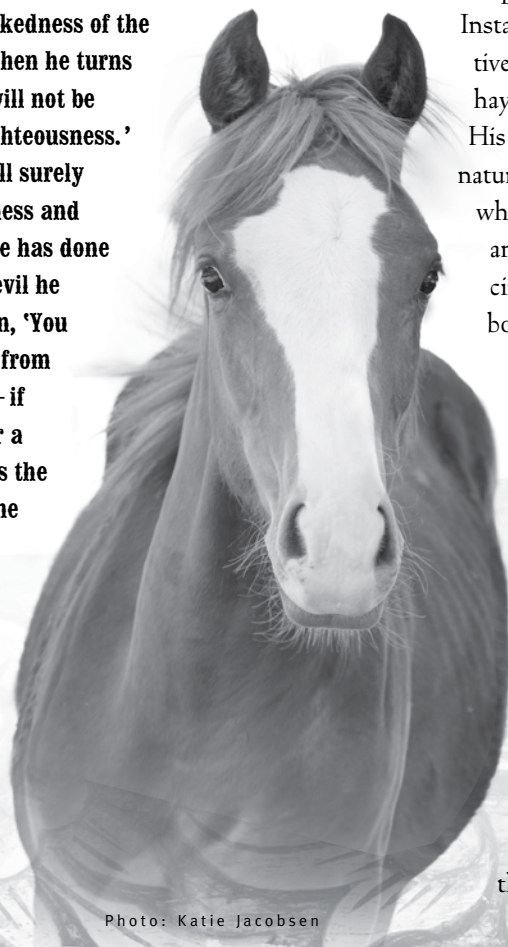


Photo: Katie Jacobsen



Photo: Katie Jacobsen

can oppose those challenges. As we train each young horse, our goal is to guide them into ride-able, contributing members of the Crystal Peaks herd. But none of that would ever happen without a ‘trainer’ stepping in to direct the process.

As our staff has started to work with Amos and Forrest, I’ve noticed a few interesting reactions. The response we like to see is calm acceptance of whatever is being asked. For instance, can you follow me? Please don’t eat the flowers or will you stand quietly while being groomed and saddled?

But ‘calm acceptance’ is not always how things go. Other reactions can include anxiously calling out to herd mates, resisting authority by physically acting out through bucking or trying to pull away. And sometimes they’ll even stand in obstinacy, having stopped trying all together.

Just like these colts, we as people, each have some choices to make. When we’re daily presented with challenges we can either receive them with ‘*calm acceptance*’ and try to grow from them—or—we can oppose them. We can see these challenges as *opportunities* to receive instruction from our ‘Trainer’, our Heavenly Father, who desires to better prepare us for our ultimate goal of eternity spent with Him—or—we can turn our focus inward, choosing to dwell on our past and present *circumstances* by complaining, lashing out, or simply refusing to try all together.

Both Amos and Forrest need a trainer to guide them through the process of learning to be respectful and kind, to be led, tied, brushed, and to ultimately be ridden by people of different experience levels. A wise trainer, through a variety of methods, will help lead their young horse toward becoming a loving, patient, willing colt—*regardless* of his past or upbringing.

When it comes to us as God’s kids, the story is the same. He doesn’t focus on what we’ve done in the past, what’s happened to us or what circumstances we’re coming from. He sent His Son—Jesus—to die in place of our sins, to take that burden upon Himself and set us free!

Regardless of what yesterday held, today *I* need my Savior to guide me, and only *I* can choose how I will respond.

The challenges of this life are constantly changing and they’ll *never* stop. Just as Forrest and Amos are encouraged to meet the challenges given them with calm acceptance and an expectant heart... when God offers YOU and I challenges... we can also *choose* to trust HIM more than our circumstances... and respond in the same way.

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
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★

You're Invited to

RANCH FELLOWSHIP

◆◆◆

Our Fellowships fall on a selected Tuesday of each month from 5:30-8:00 pm. Depending on weather, we'll be gathering either in the barn or on the grassy hill. Together in this family oriented setting, we'll share a meal, worship and teaching from God's Word.

Our Ranch Fellowship dates for the remainder of this year are:

September 8th ★ October 20th ★ November 17th ★ December 8th

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