

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

AROUND the FIRE

WINTER 2014

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

TRUEST GIFT

BY KIM MEEDER

The older I get, the more I realize that a 'true gift' is rarely something that can be purchased. It's a token or action given to symbolize one heart arcing to another. This kind of gift rises out of a place beyond the reach of worldly finances, beyond what money can buy. A true gift is priceless...

"GET AWAY FROM ME!" Nathan shouted and then turned and kicked the indoor arena wall.

I was speaking at a university in the east and, between engagements, had been invited to assist in a special session with high-risk kids. I'd been warned that Nathan was *extremely* volatile and had broken bones in his therapist's face and torso. Understandably, his therapist's expression was one of exhaustion and defeat. "He's ALL yours," she said after the eleven year-old screamed at both of us to leave him alone.

I took a few indirect steps toward him. "What's your name?" I asked in a quiet, nonchalant tone. His response was a menacing growl. He covered his face with his hands, which, from his perspective *made* me go away. His pudgy body gave silent witness that food was his primary method of comfort and refuge.

My thoughts turned to the only One who truly knew this broken little boy. "Jesus, how do I reach him? How do I get beneath his anger to his pain, to the place

only You can heal? Lord, You're the only One who knows. I will follow Your lead."

Sensing that I needed to be less intimidating, less 'adult', I quietly leaned against the wall near the boy and slid down into a crouching position. Three horses had been released at random into the arena. Two moved together, the third stood alone. Following the leading of Jesus, I began to softly speak.

"See that horse over there? She's all by herself. You can tell by the way she's standing that she's really sad." No response, so I continued to narrate what I saw. "She doesn't want to be alone, but she's afraid of a lot of stuff... she's afraid of being rejected and abandoned... again." I stole a glance at my young friend and saw his hands slowly drop away from his eyes only. Without acknowledging me, he turned slightly to look at the mare over the tips of his fingers.

As his hands dropped and hung suspended in front of his chest, I studied his face. His expression mirrored the same pain. He stared at her intently. Breaking the silence, I said, "I've felt that way too and it's no fun. I don't want her to hurt any more. I'm gonna go talk to her... wanna come?" Again, without looking at

me, the boy nodded in wordless agreement. Walking toward the sad mare, I said, "My name's Kim. What's yours?" Again, without eye contact, he muttered, "Nathan."

"Thanks Nathan for helping me. I think it's going to take both of us to combined our love to help move her out of her loneliness and pain. She doesn't realize it yet—but the truth is—she doesn't have to stay in that sad place any more." No response. As we closed the distance to the mare, she took a few steps away from us. "See that? She's avoiding us. She'd rather be alone than be rejected again. What do ya think we should do about that?" He shrugged his shoulders, in the universal 'don't know or care' gesture. "Hey, let's prove her wrong!"

I stepped in front of the red and white painted mare and blocked her evasion. As if by rote, she stopped. Her years of handling had trained her to be obedient, nothing more. She was old. Her hollowed body and stiff joints belayed that fact. Her eyes were dull and lifeless, focused on nothing. Gently, I reached out and cupped her jaw. No response. She, too, had retreated deep inside herself.



Continued on page 2



Again, I narrated my observations to Nathan. “She’s in there... *somewhere*... we just have to coax her to come out. How do you think we should do that?” Again, the shoulders shrugged in wordless indifference. “When I was in a dark place, what finally made me come out of my pain... was love. I think she needs to *know* that we love her. We can stand here and tell her that all day long, but REAL love goes beyond words... real love is expressed in actions.”

I watched Nathan. His dark eyes were fixed on the sad horse. His lips parted in deep thought. Without instruction, he slowly placed the palm of his hand on her side. I moved next to him and mirrored his action. Then, I added my other hand and started to rub the mare in soft circles. In what appeared to be a subconscious game, Nathan did the exact same thing.

Soon, we were scratching the length of her back with all our strength. The sad mare raised her head. Her upper lip began to wiggle back and forth in pure equine gratitude. “Nathan! Look how much she likes that!” I laughed. He saw the funny expression on her face and started laughing too.

I reminded Nathan of how she first moved away from us. Now, in game-like fashion, I said, “Quick! Stop scratching and hide!” Before he really knew what I meant,

I spun around and jumped a few steps away and crouched into the dirt. He followed my actions. While huddled together, his expression told me that he thought I was a little crazy... but his grin confirmed that he was starting to have fun. He was beginning to trust me.

Shoulder to shoulder, a simple woman and a broken little boy knelt on the arena floor—waiting. The silence was broken with a soft sound, and then another. Footsteps. The sad mare had moved *toward* us. Together, we repeated the ‘scratch and hide’ process until Nathan was laughing and saying, “Again! Again!” Without knowing it, he was acting out, literally *showing me*, exactly what HE wanted—a true gift of love—given again and again.

I clarified the scene for Nathan. I reminded him of how earlier the mare had been so sad and didn’t want to be touched. Then, his *persistent* gift of love broke through her sadness. Now she was coming to find him! Her despair had been lifted by his selfless actions. “Look Nathan, love is more than something you feel... it’s also something you DO. Real love doesn’t quit when it’s not loved back. Real love presses in and loves really well. Does that make sense?” For the first time, Nathan looked at my face. His softening eyes found mine—and he nodded.

The rest of our time together was an

honest display of three individuals, a woman, an old horse and a broken boy all loving each other really well. Nathan took the ‘scratching game’ to even greater heights by sitting on her. First, he sat forward and scratched her shoulders. Then, he turned around and sat backward and scratched her rump. We were thrilled to see the old horse’s expression changed from ‘leave me alone’ to ‘I’m the most blessed horse on earth!’

Before long, he was trotting figure eights and trying to show me his best ‘Super Man’ impression! The boy who—not so long ago—screamed to be left alone, was now freely giving me high fives and hugs around the neck. In return, I broke all the rules of men and touched him on his shoulders, knees and hands. I hugged his neck and once even ruffled his dark hair. Repeatedly, I could hear his therapist behind me say, “I don’t believe it, I don’t BELIEVE it!”

The boy who earlier growled at me... was now reaching for me with both arms... not because *my* love is great... but because *JESUS’* love is great. And it was Jesus’ love that arced from one heart to another and *genuine hope* was ignited.

Our time together ended with kisses on an old mares muzzle and an enduring hug for me. For a moment, even a brief moment in the heart of a boy, there was peace. Genuine pain was confronted with genuine love—there was no battle—love prevailed.

The following day I was scheduled to come and speak at Nathan’s school, a last stop before kids were sent to juvenile prison or the psychiatric ward. The superintendent gave me permission to speak freely about the only hope that could save them... the name of Jesus. I did. Many came forward to ask Jesus into their hearts to become their Lord and Savior. I watched as three pentagram necklaces were snapped off newly redeemed necks and thrown into the trash.

Afterward, within the crowd, Nathan came up. He was smiling. “Hey, little man!” I exclaimed and hugged him tight in front of all who gathered. Once released,

Jesus' passion is your freedom. He gave His life in order to heal your brokenness and draw you into a new friendship—a deep relationship forged within His heart—and sealed with the TRUEST gift of all—His priceless love.

he asked in a hushed voice, “Do you like brownies?” I laughed and said, “Is this a trick question? I LOVE brownies!” After glancing side to side, Nathan reached deep inside his pocket and pulled out a greasy white napkin. Looking directly at my face, he whispered, “I saved this for you.”



With care, I unwrapped the oil soaked tissue. Smashed within was a squashed brownie. I looked at Nathan. His eyes were glittering with anticipation. Then, he grinned. I could feel my eyes warm with rising tears. My little ‘food obsessive’ buddy had just given me his greatest gift... *his dessert* from the night before. At this time in his young life, it was what he valued most. Indeed, it was a true gift. I pulled him close and whispered back, “Thank you Nathan, thank you. You’re such a good boy, such a very good boy. I’m so glad you’re my friend.”

Because of genuine love, a broken little boy chose to give me the very best gift he could muster. Compared to the worlds warped sense of ‘value’, it would have been meaningless, even disgusting, something to throw away. From my perspective, it was priceless, beautiful, something to treasure. Why? Because I understood just how

much value HE placed on this gift and how much it cost *him*.

Within those special days a broken heart was turned toward genuine love. In the process, a new friendship was forged and sealed with a true gift.

On *this* special day, perhaps the heart that is ‘broken’... is *yours*.

Like the sad mare and the angry boy—both covering deep within a prison of pain—perhaps today, you’re the one crying out for someone to *SEE* you, to *LOVE* you, to *DRAW* you toward hope.

During this frenzied season of superficial giving... is your heart yearning for a *deeper gift*... *redemption, hope, love*? A gift that reaches beyond the ‘right answer’ to the ‘REAL answer.’

Friend, when it comes to our pain, there is only **one** true answer, “Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Thank God! The ANSWER is in Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 7:24-25a, NLT). If you’re seeking hope for your hurting heart, there IS an answer... and His name is Jesus.

In Matthew 11:28, Jesus Himself declares that He is reaching for you, beckoning you to come to Him... to leave your place of pain... and come into His arms of hope. Like the sad mare, Jesus is calling you to come out of your deep well of sorrow and choose instead His true gift... His all-consuming love for *you*.

His love for mankind is so deep that He gave a true

gift—His life as a sacrifice for ALL our sin and pain... “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. God did not send His Son into the world to condemn it, *but to save it*.” (John 3:16-17, NLT).

Just as Nathan offered me his true gift... on this day... Jesus Christ offers you the TRUEST gift... the gift of salvation in Him. “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (Romans 10:13, NLT).

Jesus’ passion is your freedom. He gave His life in order to heal your brokenness and draw you into a new friendship—a deep relationship forged within His heart—and sealed with the *truest* gift of all—His priceless love.



Pictures courtesy of Jonathan Kleppinger

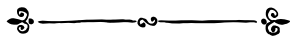
★ THE LEGACY OF A NAME ★

BY KIM MEEDER

Throughout the history of Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch, names have always been very important to us. As in Biblical times, we've chosen to rename all but a few of the horses that have come into our care. Our name is a verbal banner we live beneath our entire life. It needs to be purposeful, well thought and full of meaning. It needs to be *defining*...

On September 21st, a new colt was delivered on the ranch. Because he was born into our care, he didn't arrive with a dramatic story or life experience, he just came. The colt entered the world dressed in a sorrel coat with three high white socks and a wide blaze striping his face. His bone structure suggested that he would always be a small horse. Within days his personality revealed that he was kind, impish and playful.

What to name this special little lad swirled through the staff at the ranch. Although a few strong candidates were suggested, they were just not *the* name. After several days, Jeff, one of our staff, suggested the name 'Forrest.' Just the mention of this name made my throat tighten with emotion. Yes, YES! What an appropriate honor for his namesake.



In 1998, a small man walked up the driveway of a fledgling ranch for broken horses and hurting kids. To escape the cold wind, we found shelter in one of the only buildings on the ranch, the woodshed. Pulling up a few old wooden boxes, I settled in face to face to listen intently to my unannounced guest.

He introduced himself as "Forrest." He was a diminutive man in his mid sixties. His tiny drawn face was adorned with a

kind smile and dancing, passionate eyes. He was a war veteran, a survivor, a man who'd fought much adversity armed with little more than his tenacious, indomitable kindness.

In the following hours, I learned the reason for Forrest's visit. He came to share his own story of rescuing a volatile mustang that none of the previous dozen owners could handle. In his recounting, I watched my tiny friend verbally hike over mountains and valleys, each pinnacle and chasm punctuated with laughter and tears. Fully intrigued, I heard the story behind Forrest's words. He'd rescued an untamable horse that—in turn—had rescued him.

He understood the foundation of Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch and, in whatever capacity the Lord allowed, wanted to be a part of it.

Forrest was true to his word. He was a tireless volunteer. Season after season, he worked with children, horses and facility projects. As the years ticked by, he fell into the greatly appreciated roll of "Forrest, the fix-it man." In his presence, gates were silently balanced and re-hung. Broken rails were repaired, frozen door handles were restored and the horses' water tanks were always filled.

Forrest was dearly loved by all. One decade flowed into another. With the passage of time, Forrest's body waned. Although his abilities, strength and health diminished, his desire to 'help,' did not.

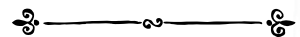
As evidence of this truth, he journeyed to the ranch to ensure that our equine family had water. He completely adopted this one single task. Season after season, he came. It didn't matter if the weather was scorching or snowing, or the tanks were drying up or freezing solid—the horses

that he loved—always needed water. This vital chore became his mission, the one thing his fading health would still allow him to do. This fact alone was enough for a tiny declining man to come and *serve* the ranch... *EVERY day*... for nearly two decades!

Finally, the day came. It was time. Forrest made the sad announcement that he was no longer strong enough to fulfill his special ministry to the ranch and the horses he so dearly loved. Tottering from one staff member to another, through a wash of tears, our beloved friend said good-bye.

I hugged my dear friend close, a man who'd faithfully served at my side from nearly the beginning. Through quiet, shaky sobs he repeated, "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I just can't do it anymore... I'm no longer strong enough... I'm so, so sorry." My tears fell with his as I tried—in vain—to ease his anguish. On this day, he was leaving the ranch that he'd loved with his life. Deep inside, he knew... he would never see it again.

Forrest was going home... to walk out the last remaining days of his life.



Yes! Our tiny new colt with the kind, inquisitive and playful nature, will be named Forrest! Wasting little time, I shared my plan with the staff—if elderly Forrest could no longer come to the ranch... we would take the ranch to him!

On a recent crisp fall morning, the *entire* staff of Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch loaded up into vehicles and headed down the familiar road toward Forrest's home. We knew that our dear old friend had one more mission to accomplish for the ranch. Gathering in his yard, together we watched



our frail warrior of a friend carefully maneuver his walker toward us one weak step at a time.

As Forrest slowly entered our midst, I watched his bleary expression transform with dawning wonder at the number of faces that stood before him. To help focus his attention, I simply spoke his name, “Forrest!” He looked directly at me. His watery eyes were searching and full of question. Peering into his kind, wizened face, I was suddenly overwhelmed by the magnitude, the sheer crushing weight of his lifelong faithfulness to his Lord, his country, to the ranch that he loved... and to me.

Instantly, my words seemed insignificant, too small to capture the moment, too weak to stand against the rising tide of emotion welling up from my heart. Tears drowned all words as they rushed forth in a flood of profound honor, gratitude and awe. In that moment, standing face to face with a dying man that I love—all I could do was cry.

Who was I to speak to a man such as this? From the worlds’ perspective, he was little more than a fading waif, a single shaking leaf poised to fall. But, the truth was... all of Heaven’s hosts were leaning near to see this LION of faith, this WARRIOR of perseverance, this GIANT of perpetual kindness... making his way home.

Still overcome, I swiped my tears aside and through choked voice, tried again. “Forrest, our true reason for coming is simply this: in the history of Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch there has *never* been a friend or volunteer as dear and faithful as you.

We wanted you to know that we *MISS YOU*... and we will keep missing you. There will never be another ‘Forrest,’ and we don’t want a day to go by without having you and your memory present amongst us everyday. So, in honor of your friendship and to keep you with us always... we want you to meet the newest member of our horse herd...”

With that simple introduction, Troy and Jeff ushered through the crowd a tiny newborn colt into the reach of his namesake, a tiny elderly man.

“Forrest... meet baby Forrest! Now your name, your presence will always be with us.” As the awareness of what was happening dawned on my dear friend, he softly gasped under the weight of his own rising tears. Moving closer, I encircled him into a gentle hug. I could feel his body shake, he was losing the battle to stifle his rising emotion. Enveloped within a circle of family, I held my old friend as he cried against my shoulder.

Once his composure had somewhat returned, Forrest steadied himself on a nearby fence. With one hand, he reached toward the tiny soft muzzle that was already reaching out in curiosity toward him. Arthritic fingers caressed the velvet of a foals nose. Without words, a baton was being passed before us. A newborn was being commissioned, tasked with the mission of carrying on a legacy... the legacy of Forrest Wright.

One by one, the staff pressed in. Each one gave Forrest an enduring hug and whispered words of affirmation. Each one gave him one last gift of love before saying their final good-bye. Then, he simply said, “I have to go now.” Giving one last wave to all, he turned and began the slow, arduous journey back toward the steps that led into his simple home.

As I watched him go, I was struck by a powerful and profound sight. Brad, one of our staff and a Captain in the US Marines,

had broken away from the group and chosen to purposefully assist Forrest step for unsteady step. Through more tears, I stood witness as a younger soldier steadied an older soldier... all the way home.

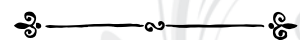
What a beautiful picture of Jesus—matching all who are His—step for unsteady, faltering, searching step. Because of His colossal love for each of us, He steadies us stride for stride... all the way into His arms.



So, on October 22nd, a tiny red colt was named after one of the dearest, greatest warriors I will ever know in this life. His name is Forrest.

As only Jesus would have it, I later learned that one of the spiritual meanings of the name ‘Forrest’ is ... *preserved*. Now the indomitable service to the Lord through this gentle giant of a tiny man certainly WILL be preserved in this place.

It’s true; there *IS* power in the legacy of a name.



“But my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God.”

— Acts 20:24 (NLT)

BACK THEN

BY TROY MEEDER

It was the winter of 1994.

Kim and I had prepared our home for the upcoming winters' cold. Firewood was stacked. Sprinkler systems winterized. Extra food stored in the pantry. In our simple way we prepared for the frigid months ahead. Sitting at the window, I recall how incredibly different this place was... back then.

Now, it's the winter of 2014. Twenty years have passed.

With the weak winter sun setting over the Cascade Mountains, our horse herd slowly makes their way through the evenings feeding of orchard grass hay. On the lawn, a wild cottontail rabbit digs through the snow to dine on remaining bits of green grass.

Looking out over the ranch from the windows of our modest home, I am in awe of how much has changed.

Once desolate and lifeless, this small piece of barren land lay in wait—for decades—to be redeemed, to have purpose again. What was once a dead moonscape of rock, now has been transformed by trees, grass, fences and buildings. Together, new life in this place heralds welcome to the families who daily come up our drive. Many of these souls come with hearts as barren as this land once was. Hungry are they for the love, healing and redemption that only come from Jesus Christ.

The tattered hearts of the broken...
continue to find healing in this place.

This beautiful, eternal transition from brokenness to wholeness continues



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The tattered hearts of the broken CONTINUE to find healing in this place.

—•••••—

through the Mighty power of our Lord and the combined prayer of those who purpose to pray for this place. The shared generosity of hearts like yours have formed a strong foundation and—in part—remain the reason this ranch exists. Because of your prayer, friendship and financial faithfulness, the healing that thrives here... is now stretching around the globe.

Generous and faithful you have been.

Once again, as Kim and I prepare for the long winter months ahead, we find ourselves profoundly grateful for each of you. Your letters, cards, emails, prayers and giving fill our mailbox almost every day. Overflowing with expressions of encouragement and love, each note represents the thousands that have chosen to shoulder with us.

As we reach forward into our twentieth year, our hearts are filled to the brim with the goodness that is you. Each and every one of you is dear to us. This ministry

would not exist without the “hands and feet” of Jesus that you are.

Back then—we were only two. Back then—we pressed toward what seemed an elusive dream. Today, we reach forward clothed in the warm embrace of our Savior and firmly supported by the strong shouldering of believers all over the world.

For twenty years, busy we have been. For twenty years, generous YOU have been.

Thank you.

Thank you for praying. Thank you for giving. Thank you for being a strong embrace of support these past two decades.

This Christmas, Kim and I wish you the fullness, grace, joy and truth that is found only in Jesus Christ. May HIS love be the covering that warms you this winter.

MERRY CHRISTMAS,

Troy and Kim

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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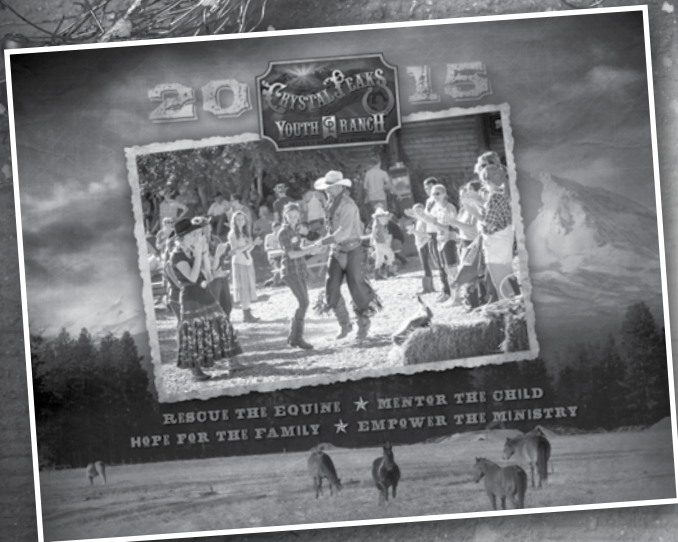
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CPYR 2015 CALENDAR



The 2015 Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch Calendar is now available for order through our website.

It is with great joy that we once again offer this free gift to you. We know you'll love the photos, scripture and quotes capturing the essence of the ranch ministry. With great intention, we've put together this calendar with hopes that it will be an encouragement to all who view it.

To order go to:

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