



BRIDGE CALLED
HOPE

STORIES OF TRIUMPH FROM THE
RANCH OF RESCUED DREAMS

KIM MEEDER

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“Kim Meeder vibrantly shares—and lives—an amazing story of hope and restoration. A triumph of recovery for wounded hearts!”

—LOUIE GIGLIO

Director, Passion Conferences, bestselling author

“Kim Meeder proves that even in our fallen world, hope is not lost. Despite horrific pasts and deep pain, God’s mercy is shown true as wounds are healed and hope is restored.”

—MIKE YANKOSKI

Author, *Under the Overpass*

“As in her debut novel, *Hope Rising*, Kim Meeder again shares with us the blessings of hope fulfilled. In *Bridge Called Hope*, Kim uses her inimitable gift of storytelling to transport us to the world of Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch—a place where the flames of hope are reignited, broken lives find healing, and mountains are moved. Stirring, encouraging, and inspirational, *Bridge Called Hope* reminds us that hope is heaven sent for everyone, and that we, too, can make a positive difference in others’ lives.”

—ERIC CLOSE

Actor

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FOR TROY

Welcome home, my Prince.



*Hope is like a
sky full of
stars...whether
we see them or
not doesn't
change the fact
that they are
always there.
Truly, it is not
until the night is
at its very
darkest...that
we see them
shine the most
clearly.*



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My Friend, you're the best, you're
our founda-tion, you're our
strength, you're our friend, you're
our family, you're our legacy, you're
our cheerleader, you're our shoulder,
you're our mirror, you're our voice
in the stillness, you're our light in
the darkness, you're our salt, you're
our truth, you're our sidekick,
you're our encouragement, you're
our voice of reason, you're our
financial help, you're our hammer
and nails, you're our hug, you're our
hay in the barn, you're our pennies
from heaven, you're our tears of
joy, you're our vitamin M, you're
our hot mocha joe, you're our ear,
you're our callused hands, you're our
prayer partner, you're our smile,
you're our starry night, you're our
campfire, you're our heartbeat,
you're our hands and feet, you're
our stone, you're our reflection,
you're our joy, you're our mortar,
you're our carpenter, you're our
voice across the ocean, you're our
warrior, you're our laughter, you're
our sticky kiss, you're our balance,

you're our trainer, you're our hope,
you're our rest, you're our hide-
and-seeker, you're our bright spot,
you're our ripple effect, you're our
student, you're our kiwi, you're
our rescuer, you're our cleansing
fire, you're our step up, you're our
flowers, you're our promise, you're
our wisdom, you're our hope...you're
our hero.

In Appreciation

To say a simple thank-you to everyone who has shouldered with us, believed with us, and sacrificed with us to see the ranch and this book go forward...feels a bit like giving a raindrop to represent the ocean. Know that I am moved by you, every one of you, and continue to be overwhelmingly grateful that you are all part of my life.

For our extended family of friends throughout this great nation and beyond, know that every card, e-mail, letter, and gift, from each individual, has become a cherished part of what this ranch is becoming. You bless me.

For Thomas, your wisdom is my sharpening stone. You inspire me to grow.

For the ranch staff, your every act of selflessness holds me up and daily reflects the woman I wish to become. There would be no ranch without you.

For Katie and Brenda, your love for this orphan is surpassed only by your faithful prayers for me. You are my warriors.

For Sue, thanks for driving, reading, balancing, listening, and...“Up we must go!” Glad there’s room on your shoulders for two.

For my Lord, You *are* my Bridge called Hope.
I love you all.

About the Ranch

Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch is a unique nonprofit organization that rescues abused and neglected horses and pairs them with seeking children. The ranch's program is special in that it almost always pairs one child with one horse, guided by one leader. All this is done free of charge—always.

One of Kim's first memories of horses came on the day of her parents' funeral. In a chaotic attempt to "ride away" from their murder-suicide, she instead rode straight into the unconditional love of a little horse and a merciful God. As each fully revealed the depth of the other, Kim's life was saved through their combination of healing love.

In 1993, Kim and her husband Troy purchased the only piece of property in Central Oregon that they could afford: a nine-acre, abandoned cinder mine. The land was so completely ruined that no one else wanted it. Together, they began the rehabilitation process by collecting organic waste materials from neighboring ranches.

For two years the Meeders spread moldy hay, used stall shavings, and manure over the rocky floor of the mine to help create a nutritive base that would once again support life. Troy brought home broken and discarded trees, and in 1995, Kim

brought home the first two broken and discarded horses. One of them was missing nearly one-third of her normal body weight, while the other had been beaten so badly a vet was needed to suture her beautiful face.

Like shattered shards of stained glass refitted by the hand of God, this broken property...filled with broken trees and broken horses...quietly became the perfect fit to heal the hearts of broken children.

Since its beginning, the ranch has been involved in the rescue of approximately three hundred horses. Today, Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch serves about four thousand visitors a year and is a permanent home for thirty horses. The effectiveness of its impact on kids has been nationally recognized and is being emulated throughout the United States and Canada through Information Clinics held each year at the ranch.

Hope is...

Hope is an amazing thing.

It is not only something to aspire to attain, it is also something to aspire to give. Hope becomes a two-edged sword within us. Like a pendulum, it cuts in equal swaths in both directions. One swing cuts a path toward freedom and release, the other toward fulfillment, gratitude, and joy. Either way...

hope gives life.

To the weak, wounded, and crushed in spirit, hope becomes a distant light in the darkness. It is a flicker of radiance that stands in sharp contrast against the blackness of grief, sorrow, and despair. No matter how small its light may appear...there is *no* pain so great that it can stop the light of hope. *No* pain, regardless of how catastrophic and charred it may be...can silence the voice of hope...because...

hope calls us.

Hope's voice calls us through our blackened cavernous places toward its unfathomable brilliance. Initially, hope may appear to balance on the horizon like a diamond, calling with a still, small voice...a voice that knows no silence. When we heed...

hope is our bridge.



Of the giants that live within our soul, one of the most powerful is our ability to *choose*. Throughout our life, choices will rise like bridges, presenting themselves in every known direction. Yet, as bright or black as they may appear...*no one* crosses them for us...we cross alone...propelled by our own will, knowing that...

hope is our choice.

The moment we say yes to hope's voice...and choose with a willing heart to cross its rising bridge beneath us...the diamond once balanced on our horizon bursts forward. Light, truth, and release pour like a sunrise over every crack and crevice of our brokenness. It drenches every shadowed place within us in golden, healing sovereignty.

Like a cleansing fire, hope roils through our dungeons, consuming every chain, bond, and barrier...leaving in its wake...only freedom. This new liberty is not found in filling our blank spaces with answers...but choosing to allow our blank spaces to be filled with peace as truth approaches...because...

hope fills our world.

Every closet, cupboard, and cranny...all lay bare before hope's cleansing brilliance. Its heat within our heart expands, stretching our thoughts, ideas, dreams, and beliefs beyond any boundary previously known.

Hope makes us bigger.

In every honest, balanced, and meaningful way...hope stretches us to a new capacity...a previously unknown capacity to change...

1

Proof

Mike looked at me with a completely emotionless expression. I held his gaze. It was not unlike watching ice melt in the sun. The thin ice of his emotional barricade was breaking up beneath him. Clearly, his defenses were beginning to collapse.

Finally, his eyes broke away from mine as all that remained of the “stronghold” beneath him completely shattered.

After taking a deep breath, his gaze wandered to the side. It was clear he was struggling with what he was about to say. Without raising his eyes to look at me, in a voice barely clearing the horizon of a whisper, he said, “I know that you don’t love me. You just say that ’cuz you’re an adult and it’s kinda like your job. But I know you don’t *really* love me...” Looking down at nothing, he absently ran his fingers through his dark hair before continuing. “No one loves me...because I can’t be loved. I don’t...*deserve* to be loved.”

I felt like I had been kicked in the gut. No air coming in, no air going out. His pain was so crushing that even from an arm’s length away, I could hardly breathe. Suddenly, shoveling rock in the back paddock of the ranch felt heavier than either one of us could bear.

Girl, get a grip, I told myself, as I struggled to regain my

balance. Mike had risked a great deal to reveal how he felt. He would do that only if he truly wished for me to prove him wrong. *Straighten up, girl! If he wants proof...give it to him!*

All I really knew about Mike was that he came occasionally on Monday with a group from a local juvenile justice facility. Like the other boys in the program, he had earned the right to come to the ranch and volunteer. As with the others, he understood that the ranch was a privilege, one that he treated with respect. In general, he was a quiet kid of approximately sixteen years of age. He appeared to be going through that gawky stage, where his feet and hands were too big for his rapidly growing slender body. His bangs were nearly the length of his nose and he had a subconscious habit of pushing his hair back behind his ears when he needed to focus. Although his brown eyes were murky with caution, he was otherwise polite and engaging.

I could only guess at what might have happened in his life that drove him to this place of ultimate despair. What was said—or worse, done to him—that would make him believe he could not be loved because he didn't deserve it? It was certainly a haunted place that, at the moment, I didn't have time to explore.

Fueled by my lack of wisdom, a quick prayer rose from my heart like a blazing flare: *Lord! I need help...now!* Thankfully, God must be used to my Hail Marys, because what followed in the next hours transformed into something reflecting far greater wisdom than I will ever possess.

Now it was my turn to take a deep breath...and reveal *God's* truth.

"Mike...you're both right...and wrong," I began, while scooping up another shovelful of rocks and tossing them into the bed of the ranch's ATV. "You're right in saying that what

comes out of a person's mouth might or might not be true. But you're wrong about your idea that you cannot be loved."

When the bed was running over with cinder, we backed it up to a very precarious ledge halfway up the pit wall, and together dumped the load of rock over the edge to help shore up the road. "You are right in believing that what comes out of a person's mouth can mean anything. But you have to admit that it is what comes out of our *life* that is really true. Mike, our words mean little; it is our actions that prove what is true. Do you agree?" I asked.

His silent response was a slight downturn of his mouth combined with a half-hearted shrug.

"Do you agree, Mike, that it is our actions...not our words... that reveal what is truly inside our hearts?" I prompted again.

"Maybe," he finally conceded.

"Good, because I have something that I want to show you," I said, as I motioned for him to follow me.

Together we entered the main corral and haltered a very large, paint horse named Hanson. I chose this young horse because of his remarkably calm and fun-loving nature. After leading him out to one of the hitching posts, side by side, Mike and I groomed his chestnut and white patched coat. While combing out his mane and tail and cleaning his hooves, I asked Mike many questions, one being that if he could choose, how would he wish for this horse to feel about him.

"He's big! Dude, I wouldn't want him to be mad at me!" he quipped. Then, after a moment, he thoughtfully added, "I would want him to be my friend..."

"Do you think that he wants you to be his friend?" I asked while glancing sideways at him.

A slight but noticeable "tightness" appeared between his

dark eyebrows. I continued to watch as he silently contemplated this concept.

“Okay...are you ready?” I asked, as we led Hanson into the round pen. His expression revealed that he understood that I wasn’t really “asking.” “Together we are going to round-pen this horse. Since you have never done this before, you have to trust me to ‘puppet’ you from behind. Okay?”

His look was intent; he was with me.

While standing in the center of the round pen, Mike took in his new surroundings. I watched him turn in a complete circle, as if to confirm that the pen wherein he stood was in fact, round. In every direction rose a solid eight-foot high wall. Answering his question before he asked it, I explained, “The walls are solid to help the horse concentrate on the trainer, and are also a bit safer for his legs as he travels in a circle around us.” Mike’s gaze was focused on Hanson as he absently nodded in response to this new piece of information.

“You will need to relax and just let me push you from behind. Hey, you should be used to life pushing you around by now!” I laughed as I reached down in the sand to pick up a lunging crop. “We are going to use this crop as an extension of our arm to help communicate with Hanson what we would like him to do. We do not ever use these to whip horses with. Got it?” I asked, as I placed the crop in his right hand and stepped behind him.

Using a round pen to train horses has taught me so much about my own life. Here at the ranch, we use “resistance free” training methods. This means that the horse is free to leave the trainer whenever it wishes. No ropes, leads, or lunge lines are used to connect the horse to the trainer within the circle of the round pen. Because horses are so incredibly sensitive to physi-

cal pressure, it is a wonderful way to communicate with them. Although far more complicated, the basic principle boils down to complete simplicity, including which direction you step.

For example, if you step toward a horse, you are pushing them away. If you step away from a horse, you are inviting them into your space. If the horse does not understand you, is stressed, willful, afraid, or playful, it can leave the center of the circle any time it wishes and walk, trot, or canter away in circles around the pen walls.

The down side of leaving the trainer is that the horse must work more. Walking, trotting, or cantering in circles might feel like freedom at first, but once the newness wears off, it just boils down to pure effort that isn't much fun.

Even for a horse, it becomes immediately clear how easy it is to do the right thing and how much more difficult, how much more work it is to do the wrong thing. When the horse is ready to try again, it is free to return to the trainer, because it is here, in the center of the circle, where all the rest, love, peace, joy, and forgiveness are.

Rarely has there been a time in my life that I have worked horses in the round pen when I have not thought how remarkably similar this must be with God's heart and mine. He never stops me from bolting away and running in circles, all the while trying to do things in my own strength. Eventually I become exhausted and realize that *my plan* just isn't working. It is then that I turn back toward the center of the circle and head back to the space that waits for me...right next to God. Because it is here...by His side...where all the rest, love, peace, joy, and forgiveness are.

With one hand gripping his left shoulder and the other around his right wrist, from behind I began to move Mike

forward toward Hanson. As I raised Mike's right hand with the crop, right on cue, Hanson began trotting around us. Together, by stepping toward Hanson and raising our crop, we were effectively telling him, "We are gentle but dominant, and would like you to move your feet away from us." As Hanson trotted in a perfect circle around the pen, I asked Mike to look at his eye and ear that was closest to us. "Can you see that his eye is completely fixed on you? Look at the direction of his ear; he is holding it just on you. Right now you have all of his attention. He is waiting for you to tell him what to do next. He's allowing you to be the boss."

Like satin ribbons floating beside him, his long white mane rose and fell with every stride. He was beautiful—there was no denying it. Mike was completely captured by him.

As Hanson continued to move around us, I could feel that Mike's mechanical stiffness was beginning to soften. He was starting to relax not only in my presence but in Hanson's as well. Still puppeting him from behind, I could see vignettes of his profile and that his lips were slightly parted. I leaned forward and spoke very gently near his ear, "Did you know that horses are smarter than people?" Gripping his wrist tighter, I slowly raised the crop within Mike's hand to ask Hanson to continue trotting. I proceeded by carefully stating "A horse *cannot* lie...did you know that?"

Even from my awkward position, I could see that he looked as if he was completely mesmerized by this beautiful creature circling around him. Even blinking seemed to be an interruption for Mike; his gaze on Hanson was completely steady, nearly hypnotic.

Our lesson continued. "Because a horse cannot lie, that means that they can *only* tell the truth." Hanson's circles around

us shrank from thirty feet to twenty-five, to twenty, his actions clearly asking if he could join us in the middle. From behind I slowed Mike's walking pace in response, and lowered his crop-laden hand. Still holding his wrist, I extended both of our free hands toward the horse, and together we took a few steps backward, inviting Hanson to come in and join us.

Hanson, who was perhaps twenty feet away, slowed to a stop. He lowered his head slightly, hesitated momentarily then began to slowly walk straight toward Mike. From behind Mike, I slipped the crop out of his hand and silently backed out of the round pen, leaving him in the center with Hanson, alone. They stood face to face, young horse and young boy. Without instruction, Mike instinctively raised his hands and began to rub the giant gelding's forehead. I watched from outside the gate.

It was time.

God, please show Mike the truth, I silently prayed as I stepped almost completely from Mike's view behind the round pen wall. "Mike," I called out. "Remember what you said earlier? That you couldn't be loved, that you didn't deserve to be loved? Do you remember saying that?" In this situation, I didn't wish for any subtlety; I wanted this answer for him to be black and white—absolutely concrete.

Even though he didn't really acknowledge my question, it was still clear by his posture that he was listening to me.

"Mike, when you finish petting this horse, I want you to do something for me. I want you to turn around and walk away."

At this strange request, he rotated to look directly at me, his eyebrows crunched together in complete confusion.

"Trust me, Mike. Just do it."

His body language totally changed. He did not want to do this. His formerly relaxed manner began to stiffen against what

I was asking him to do. As if to add emphasis, he pushed his hair behind his ears in a very fast, deliberate motion.

“Come on, buddy, this is part of what I need to show you,” I encouraged.

Lord, everything is riding on this moment. A young man's heart has been stolen. Will you please...in your love...return it to him... full?

Like a condemned man trudging toward the gallows, Mike walked away from Hanson.

When he could go no farther, he stopped and just stared at the sand that had pushed up against the base of the round pen wall. His body language gave witness to the loveless void that he believed he deserved. In the long shadows of the afternoon, with the world behind him and a solid wall in front of him, he had reached the end of his journey...completely alone.

I wondered if his deserted heart was ringing with the dry echoing of all the abandoned attempts of love that had failed.

His chin was so low that his hair fell forward, concealing most of his face. He stood very still...waiting...perhaps waiting for love to find him. The moment stretched on. Slowly, it began to feel too long, dusty, and parched with anticipation.

Piece by piece, all the world seemed to go completely silent...as if holding its breath in a unified hope that a young man's belief in a lie...would be broken.

Suddenly, Mike jumped as if he had been electrocuted! Two huge, damp nostrils had momentarily pressed against the back of his neck. Hanson's choice had been made...and he chose love...through the companionship of a broken young man.

Mike let a startled swear word fly as he jerked around to find Hanson looming directly behind him. With one hand on his heart, he exhaled in relief, “Dude! You can't sneak up on me



like that!” As Mike regained his composure, he began to pet the giant who had chosen to follow him.

With a big sigh, I, too, realized that my hand was covering my heart.

Lord, let your truth fall like a hammer. Break the lies that bind... let Your light pour into the darkness...so blind eyes can see, I prayed before I continued.

“Since you said that you don’t really believe that I love you, maybe you will believe someone else.” I paused to let this concept settle in his heart. “As far as your idea of not being able to be loved, I think that Hanson has something to say to you about that.” I took a deep breath. “Mike, this horse is completely free to go anywhere he wants to, and since you *believe* that you ‘don’t deserve to be loved,’ I want you to walk away from him...again.”

As before, Mike walked with arduous steps nearly as far

away as he could...*nearly*. Without hesitation, Hanson turned and walked closely behind him. "Mike, turn around and look," I said softly. He knew that the horse was following him, and without a word, turned and reached up, running his hand under the horse's mane.

I clarified the scene: "He cannot tell you how he feels with words...so he is telling you with his actions. Again, Mike, I don't want you to have any doubt...so walk away again," I quietly added.

This time, he left his hand resting on the top of the gelding's neck and they walked away together.

"He is a horse...he cannot lie...he can *only* tell you the truth, Mike...and he is telling you something right now. He is clearly saying without a word that you are wrong; not only *can* you be loved...he is *choosing* to love you...because you *are* worth it."

I wondered, when Mike stopped, if he had not purposefully turned his back toward me. With his face turned away, he stood leaning heavily against Hanson's neck.

Let your hammer fall, Lord...

"Mike...keep walking...I want you to keep walking away for as long as it takes for you to really *believe* what is true...because honestly, what is true...your *proof*...is following you. With every step he is *proving* you wrong...with every step he is asking to be your friend...to be in your herd...to be your family. Keep walking until you are ready to let go of your belief that you cannot be loved. Then you can stop...and embrace what you now *know* is true."

Nearly before I had finished speaking, Mike had stopped and turned into Hanson's mane. Again, his back was toward me. I watched as he slipped one arm over the top of the gelding's neck and one arm under, encircling him in a silent embrace.



He had come home...to the middle...where all the rest, love, peace, joy, and forgiveness are.

Without a sound, Mike's shoulders began to shudder. Like Jericho, the once impenetrable walls of his prison began to crumble under the unfathomable weight of truth, love, freedom. Tears of release began to fall.

There, within the privacy of the round pen, the "hammer" fell...pounding into powder the stronghold of deception that had formerly enslaved a boy. The river of truth poured in, enveloping a young man's heart in a deluge of relief. The flood came and returned that same heart...filled to overflowing...proving that the power of God's love knows no bounds.

Hanson, without a single word, spoke truth into the life and heart of a young man. What was once broken and empty began to again bask in the warmth of unconditional love. It was a love without price or terms, a love without strings or conditions...arriving in peaceful silence from the *Author* of love.

Perhaps to all others the scene looked much like a young man holding a young horse...yet, from my perspective it was clear...a young hostage was being set free.

Read more about Kim Meeder's other books

