

STORIES FROM THE RANCH
OF RESCUED DREAMS



*Hope
Rising*



KIM MEEDER

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Rising*

K I M M E E D E R



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*This book is dedicated to Beth Everest,
my precious little grandma who bought my first horse for me.
Mimi! Look what you started!*



KIM MEEDER
*2004 Recipient of the
Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Award for Public Service*

In 1972, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, U.S. Senator Robert Taft Jr., and Sam Beard founded the American Institute for Public Service, a 501c3 public foundation to establish a Nobel Prize for public and community service -- The Jefferson Awards.

The Jefferson Awards are presented on two levels: national and local. National award recipients represent a "Who's Who" of outstanding Americans. On the local level, Jefferson Award recipients are ordinary people who do extraordinary things without expectation of recognition or reward.

Kim Meeder was honored at the Jefferson Awards National Celebration of Service to America in Washington, D.C. on June 29, 2004. She was one of four regional recipients of the Jefferson Award and one of five national recipients to receive the Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Award for greatest public service benefiting the local community. Soon after, she received a Red Cross Local Heroes Award which was read before Congress. Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch has since been blessed with visitors from around the world who not only seek healing for themselves, but also wish to give of themselves for the sake of helping others.

THE PLACE WHERE HOPE RISES

Sometimes it is only through devastation that we find the truth. Hardship can be like a savage cleansing fire. All the things we think of as necessary to our survival are soon revealed as nothing more than the dross of complacent luxury, consumed by the fire as it burns down to the true metal of the soul. Hardship uncovers the only thing we truly need to survive—hope.

Within every heart there exists a special place, a place where the hopes and dreams of the soul soar, unchained by logical or physical entrapments. For some, visiting this unique place is a frivolous waste of time, a mental blowing of dandelion spores.

For others this place becomes the mountain meadow within their soul, the sweeping expanse of wildflowers and fragrant grasses, the streams of pure glacial water, where the spirit runs free.

It is a place where the impossible flourishes, where dreams survive the inferno of reality to become the miraculous wonders that draw us forward—it is the place where hope rises.

* All of the stories in *Hope Rising* are true. Some of the names have been changed to protect the privacy of the people involved.

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My Gratitude for Hope Shared

How can one thank every grain of sand on the beach or every twinkling star in the heavens? All the tender souls who have graced this work, have, in their own unique way, added richness to my life. I am intensely grateful for each one.

I am thankful for...

My husband, Troy

Your constant love and support have made this ministry possible. Without you my heart, my soul, and my life would be incomplete.

Ami Johnston

Your dedication to this project has been as unwavering as the mountain skyline. Without you I would have nothing but a binder full of handwritten pages.

Judy Gordon and Margaret Sharpe

Your miraculous efforts have guided this book through the exhausting editing process. Without both of you I would have no mirror.

Sue Morgan

You are one of my broadest shoulders. Without you my heart would be missing the joy of sharing the high wilderness places.

My Lord

Above all, my gratitude goes to You and Your sacrifice of love made for me, so that I could live. Without You, I would have no love, no light, no breath...no hope.

TO MY RANCH KIDS

You're my handful of flowers,
My skippin' rocks on the creek,
My melted ice cream,
Sweet kisses on my cheek.

You're my shining light,
My little twinkling star,
The bounce in my step,
My last cookie in the jar.

You're the miracle of life,
You're the joy of first birth;
And all because of you
I'm the richest girl on earth.

Kim Meeder

hope
rising
from
stone



Angels in Horsehair



ADAM WAS SO SMALL for his age. It was the first thing I noticed when his caseworker introduced us. His eyes, shadowed with sadness, were too large for his little face. He was drawn into himself, as if he were trying to fit his diminutive frame into an even smaller space. It was clear that this child had known more terror in his handful of years than most knew in a lifetime.

The pair had traveled to the ranch unannounced with the hope of simply petting the soft muzzles of my “angels in horsehair.” Even though the ranch was alive with children, Adam stood apart, completely alone—a tiny brown-eyed lamb lost in his own skin.

I smiled at him. He immediately looked to the ground in retreat. My heart staggered under the weight of his loneliness. I prayed that God would meet this child in this place in a special way.

I knelt down and quietly tried to engage Adam in a simple conversation. I asked him if he had ever ridden a horse before. He stared at the ground, somber as an ancient sage, and silently shook his head. “Would you like to?” I asked. His little head snapped up, and he looked me directly in the eyes with more than a little disbelief. I smiled into his questioning face. “We have a pony for

you," I told him. "A very special pony who would very much like to meet you."

"Really?" he asked, with more emotion than I'm sure anyone had seen in a while. He looked at his caseworker and then back at me. I told him where the halters were and pointed back behind the arena to where the golden pony, Hobbs, lived. Adam flashed us a little grin and took off at a run.

From a distance, in that moment he must have looked like every other child at the ranch. But from my view, I was horrified! His grin revealed a mouth full of broken teeth. He ran on ahead of us. I could feel my neck prickle before I turned to his counselor and quietly asked, "Is that what I think it is?"

It took her a long moment to answer. When she did, her voice was choked by the grip of anger and compassion. "It's so much worse than you could imagine," she finally stated. "A father is supposed to love, cherish, and protect his son. Not only has Adam's 'dad' broken most of his son's teeth with his fists, but before he went to prison, he would get drunk and make his son run around the yard while he shot at him with a rifle!"

We walked on in silence. Both of us watched Adam enter the pony's paddock and begin stroking his face. "It's a miracle he's still alive," she finally said.

Together, Adam and I led the pony back to the hitching post and went through the grooming and tacking process. Often I placed my hands over his to guide them. I held Hobbs's hooves and Adam cleaned them. I lifted the saddle into place, and he cinched up the girth. Then it was time to put on the bridle. I showed the little boy where his hands and fingers should be, how to hold his

arms, and where he should stand. Then I placed his hands so that they gripped the bridle in the right way, and gently moved him toward the pony's left shoulder. It was up to him now. Silently I stepped back and watched.

Adam stood quietly for a moment, as if taking in all that he had just learned. And suddenly, Hobbs did something I have never seen any horse do before or since. As the child stood by the pony's shoulder, Hobbs reached around with his head and neck and pressed Adam into his body. The pony held him so tightly in the curve of his neck that he could not raise his arms.

For long moments the pony stayed that way, encircling Adam's tiny body with his neck. He couldn't move anything except his eyes. They rolled back to look at me. I could clearly see that Adam was afraid.

What was Hobbs doing? I could think of only one thing to say. The words all came out in a rush. "Oh, my gosh! I think that this pony is giving you a hug!"

Adam's huge, startled eyes moved in pinball fashion as he tried to process what was happening.

"I have never seen him do that to anyone else," I added. "You must be very special."

Adam's face began to relax with my reassurance. He appeared to accept what I'd said. Slowly he wriggled his right arm out and began to hug the pony back. For a brief moment, this battered child was allowed to be nothing more than a little boy who was loved by a pony. Adam's head slowly dropped until it rested against Hobbs's neck. Like a whispered prayer, more to himself than to anyone else, he began saying over and over, "He likes me...he likes me...he likes me."

It was several minutes before Hobbs relaxed his grip on the child. Adam, seemingly so overwhelmed that anything on this earth would choose to love him, clung tightly to the pony with both arms, pressing his face into Hobbs's golden body.

Moments passed and the boy's hug melted into long strokes on both sides of the pony's neck. The stony tomb that had once imprisoned Adam's heart began to crumble under newfound love. Finally, he looked up and smiled. It was a radiant, jagged grin, so dazzling it was like trying to look at the sun. With his arms still around the pony, he turned and looked up at me. "He likes me!" he said again. But this time he said it out loud, with a convincing sparkle in his eyes.

I glanced toward heaven with a wink and a smile and whispered, "Thank You."

Eli's Whirlwind



*W*HIRLWINDS ARE a common occurrence in this place we now call our home. They come in every shape and size. Most of the time they are harmless, but Troy and I were shocked when we first saw them snatch up several wind shelters—each weighing more than a ton—lift them off their foundations and hurl them through the air. We've seen fifty-gallon drums flung over two hundred feet. We've watched as piles of information sheets, release waivers, and children's drawings of horses were swept heavenward in a spiraling vertical stampede.

Most of the whirlwinds are small enough to be nothing more than playful sprites, beckoning children to run and catch them. Forsaking the task at hand and unmindful of ears full of grit, kids will dash into the spinning dust devils, squealing with laughter as their hair is snatched straight upward in the vortex.

Although they are a bit tumultuous at times, I find the whirlwinds a source of enormous beauty, intrigue, and—perhaps paradoxically—of comfort. They are a visual encapsulation of something invisible. We cannot see the wind; we can only see the evidence of it.

No matter when a whirlwind occurs, I can't help but stop what I'm doing to stand and watch in awe. Like the

fleeting glimpse of a shooting star or a bolt of lightning, whirlwinds are a rare and wonderful sight meant only for those chosen few who turn their heads and open their eyes. They fill my heart with an intensely personal confirmation that my Lord is near.

It was Monday morning, and calls came in like a wild train of roller-coaster cars careening out of control—outraged callers burning with angry fire, concerned people pleading for merciful intercession in a case of neglect, officials looking for answers to the legal questions. One thing was clear: A horse was in desperate need.

When Troy and I began our equine rescue operation at Crystal Peaks, we had no idea how much the area needed such a place. Even before we obtained our non-profit status, the calls for help came in like a flood.

Several came from distraught owners who had entrusted a horse to a trainer, only to have their equine friend returned to them untouchable after being brutally beaten or mishandled. Some calls came from owners who no longer wanted the bother of caring for an injured horse. For me, that was the worst. These horses had given everything they had through the best years of their lives—carrying their owners to remarkable victories, growing up with their children, creating lifetimes of adventure and joy. These faithful companions had poured their hearts and strength into their families, and now, broken beyond apparent usefulness or recovery, they were unwanted and cast aside. Many were from concerned neighbors who couldn't stand to see a horse being abused or neglected any longer. Such was the case of this whirlwind of calls.

Armed only with this urgent tornado of information, I drove our old truck to the address given. Pulling off to the side of the crumbling, twisted road, I turned off the ignition and for a moment simply stared. None of the calls had led me to expect what I saw. Even from a hundred yards away, it was hideously clear that this horse needed immediate, intensive care.

Fighting back a wave of self-conscious intimidation, I made my way silently down the long paved drive. I was not a guest in this place but an intercessor, an intruder who might become the target of vicious, hurling accusations. It would have been easy to turn and run. No one would ever know of my flinching cowardice—no one except maybe the hollow-eyed skeleton of a horse whose very existence begged for my compassion.

My reluctant passage toward the rising monolith of a house seemed to stretch out before me like a never-ending journey. My steps were quick and conspicuously quiet as I made my way to the main entrance.

With each step I felt the growing weight of impending confrontation. I hated this part of any rescue operation—the feeling that I am about to awaken some slumbering disaster that lurks just beyond my sight.

The house loomed above me. It was neat and tidy and showed obvious pride of ownership. The sound of my hesitant knocking against the wood-framed door seemed to blow away in the gentle afternoon breeze. No one answered. No one home, I presumed—probably too readily.

I retreated down the walk and followed the path that led down the slope to the barn. I had to know. I had to see for myself.

I felt rather than heard the groan that escaped my lips

as the horse's horrific condition came into closer view. He was too weak even to acknowledge my presence. His jagged spine jutted three inches above his sunken ribcage. His hip bones protruded so sharply that they threatened to burst through his shriveled hide. His eyes reflected nothing. All his remaining strength was somberly focused inward, on the mere task of staying alive.

The ragged remains of his winter coat, which once must have been a rich caramel color, did little to maintain his sparse body heat. An obviously extended bout of diarrhea had left open sores over most of his rump and hind legs. Closer examination revealed that he was so emaciated that his rectum had receded within his body more than five inches. The abnormal tunnel that now exited his body was horizontal, so that his own runny waste had collected there. This grotesque buildup was literally rotting an infected hole into his ravaged body.

Anger and sorrow twisted violently together within me. A storm of emotion gripped my throat until I felt like I was choking. Caught somewhere between shouting and screaming, raging and crying, I began, instead, to run. I raced past the immaculate house and back down the long paved drive, trying to outrun my fury. Confrontation can become a monster that I prefer to avoid. But this time the monster was swept away by the ferocity of my outrage.

A flurry of telephone calls followed my visit. The necessary information was exchanged, the paperwork completed. And at last Troy and I repeated my earlier trip down the cracked and twisted highway—this time pulling our trailer behind us.

I spoke quietly with the owners when we arrived. They appeared pleasant and kind. Their deadly flaw, it seemed,

was a crippling lack of observation. With my sunglasses in place, I watched over their shoulders as Troy gently guided our new charge toward the empty trailer. Their polite words fell short between us as my attention was focused on the ravaged gelding.

Every step was so hard for him. But, amazingly, when he saw the open trailer, his head rose slightly, and he reached more with his legs to close the distance. He knew. With an enormous display of pure will, he gathered his remaining weight, and with one great effort lunged off his hind legs into the horse trailer. He was like the survivor of a shipwreck, giving all he had to leap into a waiting lifeboat. Afterward he stood motionless in the trailer, gasping from the exertion of lifting his own weight fourteen inches off the ground.

Back at the ranch, we carefully unloaded him in the common area and began the excruciatingly long journey—seventy-five yards—from there to his recovery paddock. Twice we had to stop and rest as he swayed with utter exhaustion. “You’re going to be okay, big boy,” we coaxed him. “Everything is going to be all right. Just a few more steps...you’re almost home.” I stroked his neck and reassured him constantly as we waited for him to catch his breath.

The sun had already slipped below the serrated horizon. Long shadows melted into inky pools that silently converged in a rising wave of twilight. I glanced at Troy over the gelding’s sagging neck and saw my grief mirrored in his face. We had no words, but our unspoken communication was enough—in such a moment, what truly can be said?

Two and a half days passed, and I felt growing concern

for our sweet gelding. Physically he was progressing, thanks to good nutrition and medical care. But his attitude was still inward and depressed. He had not yet acknowledged my presence or anyone else's.

I studied him through the fence, thinking, *Somewhere I'm missing the mark. I'm not getting through to him.* He seemed mentally trapped in a downward spiral, still under the weight of imminent death that had threatened him for so long. Even with that threat removed, he had given up hope. His light was going out.

Suddenly, I couldn't stand to watch this sickening process any longer. I realized that, despite all we had done, this horse was going to die.

I wanted him to know that he was cherished. With measured deliberation, I led him back down to the hitching post. After tying him off, I put together a special tray of all our finest grooming aids. He deserved the best we had. In silence, I massaged a special mix of oil and fragrance into the hair of his black mane. Working carefully, I separated each strand until the once matted and tangled web lay smooth and flat, glistening under the warm rays of the afternoon sun. Then I did the same with his tail.

After that I began brushing his body. His ragged buckskin coat literally peeled back like a rotten carpet. Overwhelming sadness filled my eyes with tears. Instead of revealing a glossy summer coat underneath, his skin was all but naked. The total neglect he had suffered had robbed his body of the ability to grow normal body hair. His black skin was barely supporting the first signs of a golden layer of peach fuzz. Mechanically my arms continued to brush. I wept out loud.

The warm air hung in stillness. Sparrows in a nesting

box overhead sang over their newly hatched family. Horsehair covered the ground in a four-inch layer of gold around my feet. I brushed and cried as our gelding's hideous body was fully unveiled. Finally I leaned against him with both hands on his shoulder and began to pray. From above angels saw a filthy woman bowing over a skeletal horse on a cloud of golden hair.

Time slipped by. Then very subtly I felt the horse's weight shift. I looked up to see his large, black nostrils close to my face. He had curved his neck around as far as he could, and for the first time he was looking at me! I held his gaze. It was still sunken, but the unmistakable twinkle of life had triumphantly returned to his once dulled eyes.

I stepped toward his outstretched muzzle and, with both arms, cradled his head against my chest. The spiral of death had stopped, and by the breath of a merciful God had been blown back in the reverse direction. I knew in that moment, he had chosen to live. Gently we held our embrace, my wet cheek pressed against his forehead.

I was lifting my head to kiss his face when I saw it. It was about ten feet wide and rotating slowly across the yard. The whirlwind, with unhurried deliberation, moved toward us until we were completely enveloped. The entire mass of cottony hair rose up around us in a golden column, slowly spiraling up into heaven.

Cradling the gelding's head, I watched in breathless awe as nearly every wisp of his fallen hair lazily rotated upward and gradually out of sight.

Still gazing skyward, I knew that my simple prayer had been answered. Like Elijah, the faithful Old Testament prophet who was drawn into heaven by a whirlwind so that

he might not experience death, so this equine friend had his hair drawn into the good Lord's domain. It was a symbolic answer to my prayer, as clear to my heart as a booming voice from the sky. I knew that this horse, "Eli" as I immediately christened him, would not die then or anytime soon.

And the answer had been sent to me in a package that I would immediately recognize. For all heaven knows that the sight of a whirlwind fills my heart with an intensely personal confirmation that my Lord is near.