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Most of all, to students through the years, remember my favorite verse for you: Jeremiah 29:11-14a: “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back from captivity...” You are so loved by our Savior, and I love you, too!

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RICK SOUZA

Hope Within Reach



This newsletter will focus mostly on Margo Ely. She retired at the end of August after 28 years of ministry at 6643 Faith Home Road in Ceres, CA. She is our resident encyclopedia about most things at this location.

I asked her to write an extensive account about her time here and how it all started. I have also asked several staff members to share a few thoughts. My own thoughts include how dependable she has always been and how she loves the Lord, her family and this ministry.

I knew this time was coming and my prayer for her is that she has great health, great joy and great satisfaction in this new season of her life.

In 1965, the American rock group The Byrds made popular the song “Turn, Turn, Turn.” It was based on Ecclesiastes 13:1-8: “There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven ...” Margo and Dan have decided it is time for retirement, time to move to Tennessee where some of their family resides, and a time for a new adventure. We will miss her as we celebrate her great legacy in this ministry.

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Putting hope within reach of men, women, and families

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DON'T MISS OUR

Upcoming Events

HOPE IN THE MOTHER LODGE 9. 17. 2022

BALL DROP 10. 22. 2022

CELEBRATING 28 YEARS OF FAITHFULNESS

MARGO ELY

Parting Words



Psalm 16:5-6 says, “LORD, you alone are my portion and my cup; you make my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely, I have a delightful inheritance.” These boundary lines or borders speak of the places of belonging God has given me. I belong to Jesus and enjoy sweet relationship with Him. I have a place of belonging with my family—my kids, grandkids and extended family—whom I love with all my heart. And I belong with my family of Faith, so many of whom are connected to Faith Home. Verses seven and eight continue, “I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. I keep my eyes always on the LORD. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.” In 28 years of ministry, 10 with Faith Home Teen Ranch and 18 with Adult & Teen Challenge, I have surely needed His counsel at my right hand and to keep my eyes on the Lord, for without Him I most certainly would have been shaken.

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PRAYER REQUESTS?

I came to the Ranch in 1994 from the office of a commercial real estate appraiser who was a devout and even “evangelistic” Atheist. He wrote letters to the editor of the local newspaper almost weekly arguing against the Bible and Christians. So, when Mary Hendrickson left her position at Faith Home Teen Ranch, she reached out to me, through the direction of the Holy Spirit, to take her place. The culture shock regarding my work environment was tremendous! I now found myself surrounded by believers who spoke boldly for the Lord and lived lives that reflected His character. Wow! My head was spinning but my heart found a place of belonging at Faith Home. And I am not the only one.

In 1920, James Johnston and his wife, Margaret, were heartbroken by the number of orphaned children they saw as they traveled the Central Valley as evangelists. They shared this burden at a revival attended by new believer, John Haine, who donated four acres of his dairy land for an orphanage. An old schoolhouse was purchased, dismantled, transported by horse-drawn wagon and resurrected on the property. Soon children from birth to 18 years of age were taken in, loved and introduced to Jesus. They finally had a home: Faith Home for Children. In case you are wondering, yes, the street we are located on was later named Faith Home Road in honor of this ministry.

In the mid-1940’s tragedy struck. Fortunately, no lives were lost but a fire destroyed the building. So many questions! All that hard work gone! Why would such a thing happen? The Lord had built and blessed the ministry, yet it appeared to be finished. Some things we don’t understand at the time but as we continue to trust God we may well see his good purposes in the tragedy. Faith Home was rebuilt, this time out of fire-resistant concrete blocks. And God continued to bring forgotten kids here where they would find a home.

In the mid-1950’s, having recovered from the fire, Faith Home experienced a time of growth. Additional buildings were added, including the shop and garage, Osborne Hall, and a staff residence. A go-cart track and playground were built, and additional land was purchased to complete the 37½ acres we now enjoy. An almond orchard was planted which has helped sustain the ministry for all these years. During these prosperous years the ministry focus shifted to troubled adolescent boys aged 10-18, and in 1967 the name was changed to Faith Home Teen Ranch. When you put boys—many of which came from city streets—into a structured, loving Christian home and school on acres in the country, you give them an optimal environment for change.

But in 2003, tragedy struck again. I received a visit from a State worker who threatened to shut our doors. While we once were licensed as a group home, we had surrendered that license in 1992, with the full knowledge of the State, to continue as a private Christian home and school. After months of meetings, emails and visits with State licensing they determined that while they had erred, if we wanted to stay open we had to become relicensed as a group home. We later learned that meant no Bible, no prayer and no sharing of our faith during the school day. Doesn’t sound much like a Christian school, does it? However, being offered only two choices, to close our doors or become licensed, we embarked on the licensing process in June of 2003 and worked steadily to write a four-inch-thick program statement and comply with a myriad of rules and regulations, some reasonable, some ridiculous and most very expensive. In the final days of the licensing process a series of events took place which changed everything. On April 9, 2004—Good Friday—we were forced to send the boys home and close our doors.

Once again, so many questions! What was God thinking? Thirty-seven acres with no boys learning, laughing, playing and making noise? It was Way. Too. Quiet. Even their footpaths through the grass were grown over. Why would such a thing happen? The Lord had built and blessed the ministry, yet it appeared to be finished. We surely did not understand the course God had us on but we chose to trust Him and within six months Teen Challenge had moved from a house on West Main in Turlock to a Ranch in the country fulfilling a vision given by God to Executive Director Dennis Whitman 17 years earlier.

Faith Home Teen Challenge Ranch was alive with hope once again and, as a ministry to adult men, there were and still are no restrictions to the teaching of God’s word, to prayer or to practicing one’s faith. Thank you God!

But with this change of ministry, I wondered if I still belonged. Faith Home Teen Ranch served kids; Teen Challenge served adult men. There was no female staff, I was female; I worked in administration, Teen Challenge had an administrator. It didn’t look promising for my future with the ministry, but I hoped to at least help with a successful transition before moving on.

Over the next six months the Lord began to stretch me into new possibilities. Eventually Dennis Whitman asked me to teach a class. He thought there were things the men needed to hear from a woman’s perspective. My answer was, “No way! You’ve got the wrong girl. I am a behind-the-scenes person. I’m terrified of public speaking. Women aren’t supposed to take on that role.” I turned him down for two years! Finally, he put a Teen Challenge teaching manual on my desk and said, “This is the one. I need you to teach this.” It was Personal Relationships with Others. By this time through my interactions with students, God had shown me there was a real need for a mom on the Ranch and He gave me opportunities to minister in that role. Now He showed me if I taught from that perspective, He would not only help me face my fears but be a tool in His hand to bring healing and hope. Eventually, I was given the opportunity to oversee all the classes, to teach other classes and to bring in new teachers. I never dreamed I would come to love this role so much.

Over the years I have watched men come in broken, angry, without direction or purpose. Then I’ve watched the transforming love of God fulfill Psalm 40:1-2 over and over again. “I waited patiently for the Lord; He turned to me and heard my cry. He led me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.” I truly see the evidence of God’s goodness all over the lives of our students, graduates and our staff, most of whom are graduates of the program. I love it when I’m talking to one of them and God pops up a memory of their first month in the program when they were still a mess or so raw from painful circumstances, or when they faced a crisis or disappointment so differently than they do now. I’ve seen God transform them before my eyes. Who gets to do that every day for 28 years? I’ve had the best job in the world! Now I hope you can see why Psalm 16 holds such meaning for me.

So, the decision to retire has been incredibly difficult. While I didn’t want to leave a day early and miss out, I also didn’t want to stay a day later than God’s plan for my life. I put up a fight, but a few minor health issues have slowed me down the past three years and this isn’t a slow ministry. Then, one of our kids moved their family to Tennessee last June, then another to Utah this June and the last one to Oregon in July. Over this time, I’ve felt my life was a puzzle laid out on a table with Jesus putting a few pieces into place here and there, slow but steady. Then, like any puzzle, the last few pieces came together very quickly over the past few months, and I knew it was time. As difficult as it is to leave something so precious to me, I am certain I have heard from the Lord. Even as sure as I am that this is God’s timing, there are tears almost daily. I am leaving a part of my heart behind at the Ranch with so many students, coworkers, and sweet friendships and moving into a different season of life. By the time you read this we will be packing for a move to Tennessee near our youngest three grandkids and I can’t wait. But I will treasure my “home” at Faith Home Teen Ranch and Faith Home Teen Challenge and Adult & Teen Challenge Faith Home Network from our new home in Tennessee. I’ve taught our students to trust Jeremiah 29:11-14 and now I’m leaning into its truth myself in a new way. If we’ve been on this journey together as coworkers, or I’ve worked alongside you as you volunteered or served on the Board, thank you for your friendship and love. Please stay in touch! If you are new to Faith Home, welcome! Your contribution is so needed, and the students are so worth it!

SOME PARTING WORDS OF CELEBRATION FOR

Margo Ely

Margo has been and always will be a godly inspiration in my life. It's been an honor knowing her while going through the program and later working with her in the ministry. She's been there since the beginning of my walk with Jesus, and it is always a joy sharing with her what God is doing in my life and the life of my family. Thank you, Margo Ely!

Margo has truly been the mother's heart when it comes to this ministry. You can tell this in all the hours of one-on-one where she has listened to the students pour out their hearts, or the hours spent coordinating with the families, or the thousands of tears shed at every completion. She is irreplaceable and will greatly be missed.

Margo has always had an amazing heart for this ministry, putting the needs of others ahead of her own needs, and always following the leading of the Holy Spirit. She's a mother figure to this ministry which provided a unique balance. She's been a great example of faith while enduring physical struggles, but amazingly never let that get in the way of serving others. She will be dearly missed.

Margo loves the Lord and shows it by the way she cares for the students and staff. Whenever I have requested prayer, she always follows up to see what has happened in the situation we prayed about, showing her concern about that situation. She will be greatly missed.

From the time I arrived at Faith Home in November 2008, there has been one person who has most embodied the spirit of Faith Home Ranch. My sister, co-worker, and friend Margo Ely has been the heartbeat of Faith Home for some 30 years and touched many a soul, first teens, then men and their families. I have shared many victories, laughs, and tears with Margo over the years. Both sadness and joy fill my heart regarding her departure. I'm sad for myself and for the students and staff because we will miss her dearly; yet I'm joyful for my sister and friend who will move on to the next chapter of her life and be closer to her kids and grandkids. Margo, you are a treasure to those of us who know and love you and an undiscovered treasure to those you've yet to meet! Much love to you.

Margo has such a tender heart for the men and families of this ministry. Over the years, I have enjoyed working with her. We have used the "My Friend" card many times when needing a favor from each other. I will miss "My Friend."

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