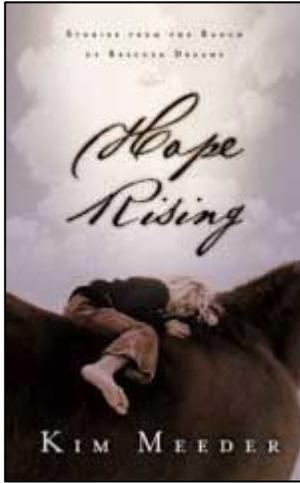


## Readin' & Writin' with Lauraine- January 2007



I hope you each received books for Christmas presents and that one of your new year's resolutions is to read more. When our Bookies reading group met in December, we voted on what books the group would read up through June. So many books to choose from. Such wealth.

I'm still—maybe I should rephrase that—I'm *always* in the research mode and finding books to help me. I saw *Hope Rising* in the Crossings catalogue and since it had a cute little blond girl lying on a horse's back, I stopped to read more about it. And fell into a real treasure. I ordered the second book, *Bridge Called Hope* both by Kim Meeder, both about life at the Crystal Peak Youth Ranch near Bend, Oregon. They are both 'two boxers', my definition for moving stories.

Kim Meeder and her husband have created a ranch that takes in abused and neglected horses and pairs them with abused and neglected kids for healing for both.

In the presence of unconditional love, a mute girl speaks for the first time. A defiant teenager teaches a horse to trust again...and opens his own heart to love. A battered girl finds love and protection in the friendship of an abused horse. These are the kinds of true stories one reads in both of these books and in the reading is reminded of dreams and miracles and the healing going on today. Crystal Peak Youth Ranch offers their help at no charge.

By the end of the second story I was wishing I could go there and be a part of the incredible work the Meeders and their staff and volunteers are doing. More and more we are learning of the amazing gifts of transformation that horses can bring to those who will take the time to make the connection.

In my novel, *Breaking Free* (to be released in September of 2007), I explore the idea of prisoners working with retired Thoroughbreds. From my research I have learned more about Therapeutic Riding-- which isn't just for children any longer but can help stroke victims or those with head injuries. I met a woman who uses horses to assist in her psychiatric counseling and another who coaches business executives with the help of her horses. There are whole new worlds out there for those who are willing to look and learn.

So what does this have to do with writing? I'm using my personal experiences and research in a novel; Kim has used her experiences in two non-fiction books, and others use theirs for articles in magazines and newspapers. I know that I will do more writing on this subject, hopefully in a series of children's books. I've loved horses all my life, never outgrew it, and this is a new way to express that love.

What has interested you for a good part of your life? Take inventory of your dreams and experiences; make lists possibly by dividing your life into ten-year or five-year segments and write down what things happened then, good, bad, or sad. Think of the houses you lived in, the cars you drove, where you worked, all these will help trigger your memories. Did you learn something from the experience that you might share with someone else?

Write it down. Are these stories your family might appreciate? Write them down or tape them. If you can turn them into humor, everyone needs a laugh, write them down.

These are the exercises I give my beginning writing students because all your life's happenings make great fodder for short stories, novels, articles and short subjects called fillers.

I hope you enjoy *Hope Rising* and *Bridge Called Hope* as much as I did. My hope for this New Year is that you will try my suggestions and realize what a rich life you are leading and be grateful for all that has happened.

Until next time,

*Happy Readin' and Writin' from Lauraine*