

CORRAL

The Ranches Alumni

What was your favorite thing to do during the summer at The Ranch?

"The Challenges. We were split into teams and went through fun and challenging tasks over a few days and it really taught me a lot about teamwork and how I can contribute to one."

-Alumni JC

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Summer 2023 Growth Through Self Awareness

By Heath Kull

Just about anyone who works with kids ends up following one of two distinct pathways:

1. They work to have everyone adapt and mold to them by punishing those who dare to ask them to change, grow or do things differently...
2. Or those who end up on a lifelong journey of discovery with growth and self-awareness as their main goals and focus.

Truthfully, the first step to any real and lasting growth and change is to first take a hard look at yourself. Self-awareness is always appreciated and discovering yourself as an adult is never easy or fun.

Recently, I was introduced to an activity that, truth be told, I am not fully recovered from. It involved 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.

"4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."

I have literally read this passage hundreds of times, but recently, I was asked to personalize it to me. I was not prepared for what I read when I made it about me

and what I should be doing and portraying.

*"4 Heath is patient, Heath is kind. Heath does not envy, he does not boast, he is not proud.
5 Heath does not dishonor others, Heath is not self-seeking, he is not easily angered, He keeps no record of wrongs.
6 Heath does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.
7 Heath always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."*

At first I was simply disappointed in myself and imagined God joining me with some disappointment of His own. As I thought about it though, I started to realize that I had, inadvertently, created a "to-do list" for my own growth and development.

Truthfully, Heath struggles with patience and sometimes fails to be kind. I don't spend a lot of time in envy, but those darn truck dealerships get in my way and those 911s at stop lights always get me imagining "what if" I had pursued profit over ministry.

I sometimes boast and struggle with the line between being proud of myself and tripping into being boastful. I have long struggled with being appropriately proud of myself for the things I have accomplished and tripping into pride that is self serving and dismissive of others.



GREETINGS FROM THE PRESIDENT



Heath Kull

President

Typically, at this time of year, I am writing y'all to ask for your support for something that we need or that needs upgrading, but this year, I'm taking a break from asking. Instead, I'd just like to offer gratitude in the form of a heartfelt "Thank You!" As we all feel every time that we end up at a grocery store or gas station, inflation is quite real and harshly felt by just about all of us.

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. -- James 1:2-4

Thankfully, I get to do a job I love, but it hasn't always been that way for me. Those closest to me have, through creativity in my writing and vulnerability in sharing the tribulations of my youth, learned that I sometimes struggle with being raised in a business that cares for "at-risk" youth.

You see, I was the smallest kid at Boys Ranch and had little in common with the kids there. I had a dad and a mom and wasn't subject to all of the rules of the program. As you can imagine, those boys sometimes took out their frustrations on me. I was typically asked to "be the bigger person" and "turn the other cheek" and countless other curt but cute sayings offered when people don't exactly know how to stand up for what is right by standing up to who is wrong.

It wasn't always easy, and I wasn't always thankful for the lessons and the tribulation, but it made me who I am by forcing me to learn to use my words when my fists weren't big enough to send any clear or lasting messages. I swore that, when I was older, I wasn't going to get married or have kids or work in this business. "Anything but here" was my refrain. But God, as He is prone to do in His infinite wisdom, had other plans. He was getting me ready for all the things he planned for me that I thought I never wanted. A beautiful wife, three amazing kids, and even a grandson that has a little too much of the stubborn that I claim not to have.

And that's the thing about the plans that He has made for us. They just kinda happen despite our stubbornness or best intentions.

So, this year, I'd just like to say thank you for making this life that I get the honor of living out each day, in front of kids, possible. I've worked to change the parts of here that were hard for me as a kid; I also have, as Earnest Hemingway suggests, written hard and clear about what hurts. In doing so, I have discovered that this job has become everything that I never knew that I always wanted. I can never thank y'all enough for supporting us so that I can do this. On behalf of all the kids you've never met and a few adults that you have, "Thank you." You make a difference that is felt for generations.

Sincerely,

Heath Kull - President
heathk@theranches.org

continued from page 1

Heath sometimes falls into the losing game of quid pro quo with kids and can dishonor their behavior without being able to keep them from thinking that I am dishonoring them. I do work hard to not be self-seeking but do have some hobbies and interests that are all about and for me that I justify with all of the effort that I put into others. I am also rather easily angered, as anger is the most common emotion relevant to change. I am not flipping any tables in the temple but do get a little bit sideways emotionally more often than I should. Unfortunately, I have a tendency to keep a detailed record of wrongs, both other people's and my own. Heath does not delight in evil but rejoices in his own willingness to stand up to those who want to commit evil in the lives of

kids. Not exactly what the Good Book says, so I'll need to work on that one too. I do spend a lot of time rejoicing in the truth... except the ones that sting that offered in my direction and hold the truth in the rebuke. Heath does do his best to protect but struggles with trust. I also tend to have a stupid amount of hope that allows me to persevere through some pretty intense storms, but I sometimes struggle when I am on my 25th round of forgiveness for the same child or adult child at The Ranches. In essence, I still have my own work to do while providing the opportunity for kids and staff to do some very difficult work of their own.

If you would like to do this rather simple and excruciating process, I have included the template on the next page.



continued from page 2

- _____ is patient
- _____ is kind
- _____ does not envy
- _____ does not boast
- _____ is not proud.
- _____ does not dishonor others,
- _____ is not self-seeking
- _____ is not easily angered
- _____ keeps no record of wrongs.
- _____ does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth
- _____ It always protects
- _____ always trusts
- _____ always hopes
- _____ always perseveres

If you're anything like me, this will serve as a pretty significant heaping helping of Humble Pie. As someone who was thrown into the deep end of the emotional swimming pool as a child and ended up being someone on that aforementioned lifelong journey of discovery with growth and self-awareness as my main goals and focus, this one hit me pretty hard in the feels. It also gave me some clear direction on the things I need to work on as a husband, father, and head of The Ranches.

The Changes We Work For

The last several months have been quite the whirlwind at The Ranches. We saw a couple of our kiddos graduate from high school and are working to support them as they pursue a life after The Ranches. While fear and anxiety are often overwhelming at their age, we work hard to remind them, as C.S. Lewis so eloquently put it - ***"There are far better things ahead than any we leave behind."*** Even while acknowledging that we are a few of the things that they need to leave behind as they embark on a life that will, hopefully, become one that they are ultimately proud of living.

You see, we spent our time with them before they ever graduated, and we are now in a position to renew our relationship with them as adults. While scary, we have to remind them of the words of Barbara Kingsolver who said, ***"The changes we dread most may contain our salvation."***

Nowhere was this more pertinent than a recent conversation with a graduate from a couple of years ago. She was accepted into a rather exclusive program at UNM that allows her to pursue her MD while working through her bachelor's degree requirements. She was diligent in her classwork, but her scholarships came up roughly \$2,000 short of covering her dorm room. Unfortunately, she grew up not ever being able to trust anyone in these moments and struggles with asking for help. Thankfully, one of our people found out about this, and we offered to cover the small price tag associated with her big dream.

While the financial struggle is real for her, she is also, in many ways, creating quite a difference between herself and the family that she came from. A difference in the level of education attained, a difference in how she builds - and refuses to selfishly use - relationships with healthy people that want to support her and see her succeed. She has accidentally tripped over the words of Mandy Hale who said, ***"Change is painful, but nothing is as painful as staying stuck somewhere you don't belong."***

This is, in a nutshell, what we do and what your contributions support. While this is a specific example meant to clue you into the joy that we occasionally feel when a resident's exceeds their own expectations, this isn't as unique or as rare as it used to be. You see, I made the choice to value relationships first and structure second in my leadership of The Ranches. Not everyone agreed along the way, and I also had to really work at understanding that, for me, much like the kid I am referencing, ***"Change is painful, but nothing is as painful as staying stuck somewhere you don't belong."***

For as long as kids are here, we want to give them a pathway not to belong here, but to create a space where their kids can one day belong with them.

Continue reading on page 4



The Acceptance of Rejection

For as long as I can remember, there has been an incredibly difficult reality present in our work. For kids who are with us until their 18th birthdays and kids who are in foster care until that birthday that denotes the perceived start of independence and freedom, “aging out” is for many, the start of their real struggles and the hardest parts of growing up without parents that are involved and engaged. While in our care or in foster care, many kids start to accept the rejection that led them to group and foster care. If they accept that rejection long enough and fail to heal, they often reach a point where they start to reject acceptance. This vicious cycle is terrifying to the kid and difficult for adults involved in the child’s life. One of those kids recently shared his rather unfiltered thoughts. I wish I could make it hurt him less to write and y’all less to read, but here it is with only a few modifications.

By former resident, Brandon

Pain

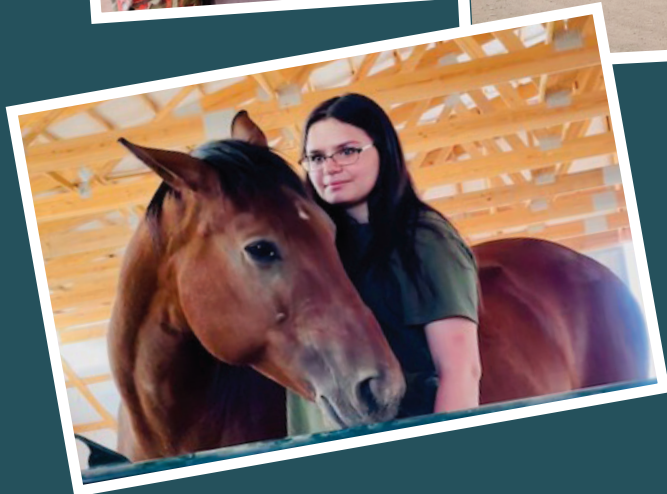
I sit at night staring at the ceiling, thinking of life, but not only does life come in as pain follows. When I see myself, I say I’m fine and feel fine, but at night I can never sleep. If I do sleep, I go in-and-out of sleep. I could say that it’s for other reasons, but it really isn’t. Night-time is when you’re alone, and nothing can keep you from your thoughts. Well, God can but here’s the thing about that, God lets the devil mess with his toughest soldiers. I see that every day that I wake up. God gives me another day to do what He wants of me, but then, at the same time, there is a hole in me that I can only fill when I’m around people; and even then, if I’m around people that are together and I am by myself, the hole comes smacking me. Loneliness is a big factor of what kills men. I try to cope and move with the hole of feeling empty. What helps me is starting not to work anymore. I work my butt off and go try and have fun, but really, do I have friends or just people that call me that and then when they think I can’t hear or see them, turn around and then are completely different. I have realized that the main reason I don’t connect with someone in a deeper relationship, is that I keep getting shown why I put walls up and keep everyone away. I try to avoid it, but then I keep seeing and keep having people show me, “Hey, wake up man!” They are just using you, and they will walk away and find someone else that is different. But here’s the thing, they come running back to me and saying, “Hey, you were right. That man did do that,” or “That person was that way to me.” I get told that I’ll find someone someday, but I always say “No, I won’t” and I say that because of the experiences that have shown me that I am better off just living life alone. Yes, as lonely as I am, I can change those around me, and I can’t help people see the worth that I know I have. You could say I have self-esteem issues, but we all do. I just stay away and keep everyone at arm’s length, because the only time I get a message on my phone or people interact with me, is if I put out effort or if they need or want something from me. My pain runs deep, and it gets deeper the more times I get close to someone. I carry a lot on me, and I try to make it smaller but it’s hard. My pain keeps me up at night or makes me cry myself to sleep. I’ve had very few people that could soothe the storm that’s inside me, but then, in the end, they all turned around and left. Yes, I’m afraid and hurt, but what can I do? All I can do is move forward and, guess what? I can only get stronger from it. I do, but the other thing is I get left with scars. I get to see others happy, and I say “congrats” but, at the same time, I tell myself “One day” when really, I don’t see that day ever coming. I’ve noticed a lot, and I hear and see a lot, and with that I’ve noticed that I’m just a shadow that lingers in a group even if I make it fun’ I just turn out to be the black sheep or the one that then gets forgotten or pushed aside. There is nothing more that I want than to have someone say, “Hey, I get you” and have them mean it and actually get me and not just empathize or sympathize with me. I do not need that. Pain is a demon I deal with daily and sometimes I feel that it makes me depressed, but I know that there are people that want to see me succeed and do better. So, pain is a big thing that I will probably deal with my whole life. I’ve just got to keep moving on like it is just another thing to add to an emotional resume. But the pain that I have experienced is emotional, but it also turns into physical pain because certain parts of me start to hurt, and I just hide it and move on. Well, I guess all I can do is be a part of it and just learn to live with my pain and hope that one day I will be able to heal from it.

Losing

I have a life that I have pretty much created on my own. I’ve had some help here and there, but there is one thing that always stops me when I see people. It’s the question, “What did I lose trying to accomplish all that led me to where I’m at?” I see many people that see me and say, “Wow! Nice truck, nice clothes, nice whatever” but they never actually stop to ask, “How are you? What did you do to get all these things you have that are nice?” Well, I can tell you! I had to make so many different kinds of sacrifices and, while sacrificing, I have lost so many opportunities and other things along the way.



THEIR JOURNEY





THE RANCHES



Continued from page 4

In order for you to get to your dream, it first starts with you not letting others know about it because what are they going to do to get you to your dream? Nothing! Because they're not you. I don't have a girlfriend but not because I don't want one. Because I'm somehow "not enough" or I'm "too much" for the other person who is on the receiving end of the relationship. I have very few friends because not all of them tell me the truth and not many people can match the energy that I put out. I have a hard time letting go, but that is also because once I get something good, why should I just do nothing while I lose it? Well, I've learned that you can't force people to stay or have them talk with you or even be honest with you about what they really think or feel about you. So, I sit alone a lot thinking, what does the next person want, or does this person want to stay, or am I going to add them to the list as someone I'm losing to or have lost? Usually, I can tell before someone tells me that they don't want anything to do with me, because they show so much that they think they are hiding. Really though, they aren't hiding anything. It's just so hidden for them because they lack the ability to see what they are doing. To conclude, all this to say "if people really want to stay, they need to prove to me now that they will and, to do that, they will have to fight to earn my trust.

What people don't get

Many people walk around trying to make everyone around them feel better. I happen to be one of those people. I've noticed that no matter what I do or how I act towards anyone, I am just a place holder for them. Whether it be just holding a spot as a so called "friend" until they find a better friend or a relationship that they can throw me aside for once they find the man they actually want. It is sad to me how many people meant something to me, but they left, so I ended up alone. Yeah, I maintain and have a friend group, but I bet that, if I needed one of them to come save me from myself or from something else, only one or two would come and help. That's how lonely it is.

Unfortunately, my family also used me as a place holder. They only adopted me because they thought they would get closer to heaven by doing so, and then, when they realized I was no good for that, I got thrown out with the rest of the trash. I may have a horrible past, but I don't let that determine the relationships that I am capable of having. Although it's hard for me to sit here and watch many people around me use me and then, when I'm no longer needed, be thrown to the side. Many people tell me keep my head up, but I don't think they realize how hard it is to even roll out of bed with the pain and suffering I live on a daily. I wake up to only one person who I've only known for less than a month checking up on me. I have so many people who think I'm just an option for when they don't have someone else to give them the attention that they want. I know that people see a happy so called "nice guy" when they meet me, but really, I'm just a man who has been hurt so much that I don't want anyone else to go through that...or see my pain.

I've told some people what I want in my life, and they ask me what about a wife and kids. I just look at them like, "Do you really see me having any of those?" Because I don't see it. So, I just tell them, if it happens, then it happens, but I don't get my hopes up for that. When I think I get close, I just get turned down and told that I'm not "good enough" for them. So, I just walk around with my head up and look like nothing has happened, but really if you were to sit down and have a deep conversation with me, you would see my mood change, my eyes start to water, and my body just slouch because all my pain is a weight on me that no one else will ever be able to hold. I get asked by many people, "How come you're so young and know what you want?" It is because when I was sixteen, I realized that no one is going to understand my dream and be able to get me to my dream except me.

There's going to be people who try and stop me from my dreams, but I have just got to keep fighting for them. With all the pain I've lived with, I've learned how to fight for what I want. But deep down, when it comes to the end of the day and I'm alone and just thinking, I realize that even though I'm going for my dreams, it is quite lonely. I just wish that one day I would be able to find that one person who is willing to stand hand in hand with me and accept being loved by me. And for them to love me as I reach for the dream I want. But in the world we live in, that's a lot to ask for. So, I just ask those who don't know what I am to them to figure it out because all you are really telling me is that you don't actually want me around. I often just say this last thing, "I'm here, but I'm in a lot of pain inside and out. I may not be exactly what you expect, but don't let





Continued from page 6

others decide what you want with me and don't just let me be a place holder for you. If you want me, I'm glad because then you'll get the whole world as I continue in my life with you. But if you don't want me and you just want me as a place holder for you, then you need to figure it out because I'm going to keep moving. Whether you're with me or not, I loved you and showed that but I'm obviously not good enough for you to stay. In the end, either way, just know I'm still going to feel lonely and cry myself to sleep because I carry so much.

What I've noticed

A lot has changed for me. I'm a young 20-year-old male with depression, but no one seems to care. It's either I don't have the rank to say anything, or I don't have the experience to say anything, or I'm not old enough to know. Well, not a lot of people know me. I've been through a lot in 20 years. I was a young kid when I learned I had depression, but all that meant to people was I had a problem that needed fixing. I don't really have people to look to because they just laugh at me or shrug me off. I feel like I need to make others happy in order to be happy, but in the end, I just notice I'm hurting myself more. I see those that I help to be happy, and it just reminds me that I'm always alone. I don't have much love in my life and those that do love me, it's only temporary love. I noticed that I get used a lot. I give a helping hand, or I try and be someone's crutch when they're in pain, but really, they just waste my time and energy. I let people in just for them to turn me away. What's the point and being a friend to those around me if they just see me as nothing? I get asked to go with other people's friends, but in the end, I don't really have friends, and those I call my friends really aren't. I try to be happy, but it's hard when time after time you get rejected or you get told, "I like you as a friend" and "I don't want things to change between us." I am sick of it. I want to be happy. I want to stop being so alone, but people just keep reminding me that it is my place. I'm not meant to be happy or be loved by those around me. I'm just meant to be used and passed off to the next person. Then, when they're done, I am to be passed on again. I have lived this for 20 years, but I keep pushing through. I'll get weak and tired. I don't know how much longer I can make it. I feel heavy every day. Don't want to eat. Don't want to move. Feel like if I do make someone else's life better, I'm just going to be shoved back into the dark place because I'm not meant to see the light of what happiness is. My life is meant to make sure everyone around me is happy, but when in the heck do I get to be happy? When will I not feel so lonely? When will people realize I'm more than a screw-up, last option, or a joke? Is my life just meant to make those around me feel good while I suffer in silence? I don't know why I'm still here. I've been asking to leave this world so all the pain and suffering will stop because I can't take it anymore, but I wake up to another day in more pain than the last. I guess this is my life's pain. It's what keeps me up at night, and what keeps everyone else happy is me being in emotional pain, but who cares? He can take it. He will survive. He has been through it before. I give up. I can't go through pain every day. It gets exhausting. Well, I will see what I have for tomorrow, but I know it's just going to be more pain and me being another expendable person."

Thank you to all the businesses, organizations, and churches that made monetary gifts in excess of \$150 during the period of April 1, 2023 - June 31, 2023. We deeply appreciate your commitment to children and families!

THANK YOU

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Representatives of New Mexico Boys and Girls Ranches are available to meet with clubs, civic organizations and fellowship groups, either in person or via the web, to share our story of bringing hope to hurting youth.

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