



JUNE 2025

# Christian Encounter NEWSLETTER

## STUDENT PROFILE

### Phoebe

Phoebe stood at the front of the room, voice quavering and tears streaming down her cheeks. It was Spiritual Emphasis Week at the Ranch, and Phoebe had been given the opportunity to share her testimony with the Ranch family.

Phoebe shared with us her deep grief. Grief from abandonment, from abuse, from poor choices, from significant loss. She spoke of the deep seated lies that had dictated her decisions that resulted in destruction. Adopted when she was 18 months old, the neglect from those early months of infancy would have lasting ramifications. Phoebe had resisted any help that was offered from her parents. She had come to only trust in herself. However, when her biological grandfather mentioned that her uncle had benefited from a program called Christian Encounter, out of curiosity Phoebe looked

it up. The door was opened to her, and she reluctantly stepped in.

Upon arrival, Phoebe was donned in all black, wearing a vest with skulls and a black fedora. In conversation, her laugh was hollow. She used humor to deflect what really lay beneath. Phoebe was determined to maintain the persona she had carefully constructed.

The next several months would involve the dismantling of this persona, allowing her true self to be laid bare. Phoebe remembers an intern who was here when she had first arrived - someone who was quirky and unabashedly herself. This gave Phoebe permission to let her quirks show, too. In August, the wilderness trip presented many challenges where Phoebe would need to lean on others in order to see the 15-day trip through to completion.

Still, building trust in relationships would take time. Phoebe cites her fifth month as when she really began to open up in counseling. (*cont. on pg. 3*)



## DIRECTOR'S VIEW

### "Jesus."

One of our young ladies graduated from the program recently, and I met her parents when they came to participate in the celebration. They shared some details with me about the transformation they saw in their daughter. The day before they had asked her, "What makes the Ranch so special to you?" They said they expected her to say "the people here", or "my relationship with my mentor", or something similar. Instead, she simply said, "Jesus."

That brought tears to my eyes. As a leader here, it gave me great joy. I think this is the best thing I could ever hear about the Ranch. I also agree with her: Jesus is why the Ranch is so special to me, too.

When this young lady had initially arrived at the Ranch, she was in a very different place. When her mentor would ask her what her thoughts about Jesus



were, she had a much different one-word answer: "No." She didn't even want to talk or hear about Jesus.

The Ranch is a place for those who have experienced terrible pain, loss, and

trouble. But the power of the Gospel and Jesus' all-conquering love evidenced on the cross is in no way nullified by the depths of our trouble. Instead, the redemption we witness at the Ranch only makes Jesus' love even more precious and beautiful to me. Not only does He save us from our sin and redeem us for eternity; as if that weren't enough already, He is also able to bring to life the parts of our hearts that become deadened by darkness and damage. Due to His great kindness, He often uses people in this healing work.

The young lady's answer to her parents was very wise. She values the friends she made here, but she's also fully aware that, as a community of forty to fifty people, we daily make mistakes in action, word, and heart. These mistakes create yet more sadness and trouble. But God redeems even these mistakes, and uses them to remind us again and again that what we really need is Jesus. He is the only one who is able to make this place special!

*Nate Boyd, Executive Director*



## A good gardener



By Madi Bailey,  
*one-year intern*

Below the business office there is a row of irises. The task on outdoor work program was to tend to this area, to weed and remove anything that is not a flower. As I was pulling weeds, the Lord gave me a visual of my internship.

I closed my eyes and envisioned an endless garden. Infinite amounts of wildflowers, every flower known and unknown. A singular tree in the midst of this garden. I saw myself barefoot and wearing a white flowing dress. First noticing the overwhelming beauty of the garden, I was hesitant to move from where I was.

"Follow me," a recognizable voice whispered in my ear. As if my body was sliding down a wall, I buried myself where I was.

I felt a presence next to me, holding me. *I am safe.* "Follow me," the voice said again, speaking louder. I felt my hands being held. I was embraced by the light, by Jesus.

When I glanced behind me, I saw where I had come from, the domain of darkness. An overgrown wilderness desolated by unspeakable horrors.

Tears softly rolled down my cheeks as I gazed at Jesus. I closed my eyes and said, "I am scared. Where you want to

take me I have never been. I lived in the wilderness on my own. I do not know how to walk with You to the promised land." Jesus wiped my tears and said, "My precious child, you were never alone in the shadow of death. I was with you every moment. I will remain with you. I am bringing you out of the domain of darkness and transferring you into my kingdom."

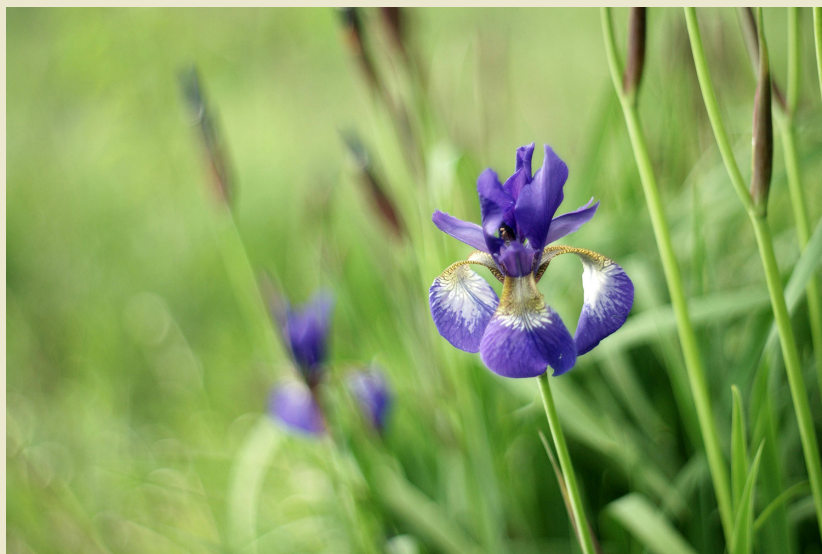
We leisurely walked through the wildflowers. The journey no longer felt daunting. Our mission was to make it to the tree of life.

On the way I noticed a secret garden. A separate garden that was gated, surrounded by chains and locks, that held flowers that were consumed by weeds and thistles. I picked up my pace noticing this, wanting to walk past as I felt the darkness that I once felt before. In my avoidance and rush, Jesus slowed down and stopped.

Jesus had the key to unlock the gate. He entered and motioned me to follow behind him. "Do you see that this garden is separate from the other? That all these

weeds and thistles have not been tended to? That this garden holds sins that you have not yet addressed, which you have ignored. That each weed represents something in your life that you have not fully given to me. We are going to pull weeds out, pulling them out by the root. I will pull the majority of the weeds, but some of them I will need your help with. Some are so big that I need you to choose to let go," Jesus softly explained.

Overwhelmed by the amount of gardening that needed to be done, I



crumbled into the weeds. This was the bed I would lay myself to sleep on each and every night. I wept and Jesus did too. He expressed, "Gardening is to allow the flowers to have more resources, so they do not have to compete with the weeds for nutrients. *(cont. on pg. 3)*

## SCHOOL UPDATE

We are making good progress on the high school building expansion and are months ahead of schedule!





## Phoebe (cont. from pg. 1)

She had turned to self destructive habits once again, not knowing how to cope with what she was feeling. "I used to think I could do everything by myself. Then God said, 'Now you have a Ranch family.'"

Phoebe's relationship with her intern discipler, Madi, also began to strengthen as Phoebe began to acknowledge God's presence in her life. Phoebe confided to Madi, "I desperately need help. I can't do this alone." Madi encouraged her to bring this to the Lord. On the Girls' Igloo Trip in February, Phoebe was getting into her sleeping bag on the second night when a thought came into her head: "'It will be okay, my child. I am in control. All you have to do is see that truth and let go; it will be freeing.' I believe God was saying this to me for I would not have continued through the trip if I hadn't clung onto those words."

These words of reassurance have allowed Phoebe to continue in her pursuit of wholeness. As the dismantling continues, there is opportunity for a new foundation to be built.

Phoebe is training her gaze on the Good Shepherd, learning to trust His voice.

"For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks



after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness.... I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign Lord." Ezekiel 34:11-12,14-15

Zoya Lee

## Gardener (cont. from pg. 2)

As we pull each of these weeds, we will have to come back to this garden to maintain growth. This garden is your mind," Jesus spoke. As we finished for the time being, I walked more in step with Jesus, starting to understand why I was following him.

The once distant tree became nearer to us. Barren leaves and rotten fruit consumed the branches. Each fruit on the tree represented a negative belief about myself. "When these roots are gone, the rotten fruit will fall," Jesus explained. I questioned how to reroot myself to bear new fruit. Jesus answered, "Your identity is in what you root yourself in. You can build your beliefs on the foundation of being a child of God filled with the fruit of the Spirit. This tree is your heart."

This garden represents my life as a whole. During this internship I have had the freedom and the experience to walk through my mind and heart with Jesus, and to endure the process of healing. Mentors, counselors, and disciplers have also been my gardeners, helping me identify the growths in me that are causing more harm than help. In this help, they are also identifying the flowers that are growing in me, not just letting me fixate on the weeds.

## AGONY KICKOFF RIDE

We had perfect weather for a morning group ride. A special thank you to Duane Strawser for doing bike fittings which will greatly benefit riders as they prepare for Agony!





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*Join us for the 43rd Agony Ride!*  
*July 25-26, 2025*

*Christian Encounter is a non-profit, non-denominational, residential community helping 16- to 24-year-olds by providing love, spiritual guidance, high school education, counseling, and 24-hour supervision. Internships are offered to young adults 21 years and older. We are a member of the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability, and all gifts are tax deductible.*

**ACSI**



## Position opening: Lead Counselor

As our Lead Counselor, Kevin Phillips, moves toward retirement, we are looking for a licensed counselor to step into this position. This is a key leadership role at the Ranch, with tremendous potential to lead young lives toward healing in Christ. It includes counseling the students and interns, primarily the young men. This is a full-time position and includes benefits.

**Requirements include:** Love for the Lord and for young people; readiness to step into complicated and challenging situations to carefully discern the best path forward; ability to oversee student admissions; desire to work in concert with the discipleship team and serve in an immersive ministry community.

*Interested? Have a lead? Email [nate@christianencounter.org](mailto:nate@christianencounter.org) or call 530-268-0877.*