

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules
Episode #166: How One Woman Turned Trauma to Triumph

Cheri: Hey, this is Cheri Gregory –

Amy: – and I’m Amy Carroll –

Cheri: – and you’re listening to Grit’n’Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules. The podcast that equips you to lose who you’re not, love who you are, and live your one life well.

Amy: Today we’re talking to Kim Tschirret. Kim has 20 years of executive management experience that prepared her well for the launch and management of a non-profit. It’s her love of horses and firsthand knowledge as living as a child in abuse and trauma, however, that’s giving Kim the heart and passion to start an organization to help kids and family in similar circumstances. Hope Reigns, an organization that pairs traumatized horses and kids for healing, is a beautiful result.

Cheri: And I’m just gonna give a Kleenex alert for all you horse-loving gals. The first time Kim said “horse” I pretty much lost it and it stayed that way for the rest of the episode.

Amy: Kim, I got the great pleasure of attending one of your fundraisers at Hope Reigns recently, and I fell in love with the place.

So, tell us a little bit about your story and how Hope Reigns came to be.

Kim: What we do at Hope Reigns – just to give everybody context – is we work with kids that are going through trauma and life crises, and we pair them with horses that have

been rescued from similar circumstances, and we really help them find hope and healing in that relationship that they build together.

I grew up in Ohio, in a really upper-middle-class family that, you know, my father was very successful and we went on great trips – we really had everything monetarily that we ever needed, and it looked really good, but what people didn't know is that on the inside it wasn't good. My father was an alcoholic, and very abusive, and I never have any memories of feeling safe in my home as a little girl because he was so explosive and you never knew what was gonna set him off.

And if anybody listening as an adult child of an alcoholic will understand this that we were not allowed to talk about it. We didn't talk about it in the house, and we absolutely were not allowed to talk about it outside the house. So I grew up with all this shame and this guilt and my message was "There's something wrong with me," right, "There's some reason that my dad doesn't show me his love." And we didn't have a faith – like, we went to church every once in a while, but it was more again for show, 'cause it looked good.

But I actually had a horse, and that was like my comfort, and I can look back now and see that that was God's hand, right, that was kind of His gift to me and the place that I went where I felt safe. And my horse was really the only thing I ever whispered my secrets to that I ever shared what was going on. So later I became an adult and realized "Ok, that was not normal, and that was not ok." So my sessions started a long time ago, with my horse, and then many years later I came to be a believer.

You know, my whole life was about performing, performing for my dad, trying to figure out "Ok, what am I gonna do that I'm actually gonna get love and positive attention from him?" And so, he was successful in business, so I was determined I was gonna do the same thing, and that's what I did is I had a really successful career in marketing and it was very empty for me, and I spent many years knowing that I had this empty hole, and just filled it with relationships and work and moving and just about anything I could do.

And then one day my husband and I got married, and we moved here to Raleigh, and we went to church, and I heard somebody say “It’s Jesus.” and that was just the moment that changed my life forever. I really pursued the Lord with a lot of vigor and started to ride horses again, I discovered that back in my life, and then I found this book – it’s funny that we have a book now, because we’ve always joked that we’re never gonna have a book. I read this book called *Hope Rising* by Kim Meeder, and they do something similar in Oregon, and that was the catalyst to start Hope Reigns. (I read the book and that’s a story in and of itself.) But that was my inspiration. But truly, the inspiration and what drives me is I don’t want any of our kids to not have a safe place to come to and be able to talk about what they’re going through and be able to heal from it.

Amy: Well, there’s so many things that I want to tell from that day that I was at Hope Reigns, but I got to meet the author of the book that was written about Hope Reigns called *Joey* – we’ll put that in the show notes ‘cause it’s fantastic—I got to meet Jen Bleakley, the author, and there’s so much in that book, just miraculous, that happened to allow Hope Reigns to even exist. Tell us just briefly the story about how you got the land for Hope Reigns, because land here in Wake County is extremely expensive.

Kim: Yeah, so, I had read this book and I started talking to like, my husband and a few people and they were all kinda like, “Ok...” you know, it was very left field. I was a stay-at-home mom, you guys. I quit my career. I said, “I am never gonna drive a minivan, and I am never gonna stay at home with my kids.” And guess what happened? I was so happy for seven years staying home with my kids. So it was very random that I read this book and all of a sudden – this is what I wanted to do.

And everybody kept telling me – Amy, just like you said – that “Ok, you’re never gonna find land, you’re never gonna find land, you’re never gonna find land.” And my husband and I went – our kids were really little at that point, I think Chance was about 5 and Isabelle was 3 – and we took them on an Easter egg hunt with this church. This church, here in Raleigh, owns a 70-acre piece of property literally right off a major interstate, and arguably, one of the highest price areas to purchase any kind of land. And we went on this Easter egg hunt, and there were some horses down at one part of the property, and where we were was this overrun field, and it was like this whisper from the Holy Spirit of “What is this place?” and “Could this be a place?” So I went in and met with somebody from the church. I put my little business plan together.

I put my marketing hat on and went in and met with them, and I had a plan of “This is what I wanna do.” thinking “Oh, this will be really great to get feedback,” you know, no thoughts at all that this was gonna work out. And he, literally, in our meeting, got up and he went to his credenza, rolled a map out, and said here’s 20 acres. And the funny thing is we leased it for a dollar a month. So, yeah, we had property before we ever even started. We were not a 501C3, I hadn’t done anything, any filings. w\We didn’t have a name. So it was kind of like the one thing that everybody kept saying wasn’t gonna happen was the first thing God said, “I’m just gonna take that right out of the way.”

Amy: So amazing. And the land is incredibly beautiful. It’s just so gorgeous.

Kim: Well, our old property was really beautiful. That’s where we kind of got our start. Our current property, there’s a whole story there too, it’s another miracle on how we got that. So, yeah.

Cheri: Wow. Yeah, well, I’m over here – Amy has probably noticed I’m over here wiping tears from the moment you started and said the word “horse,” because I’ve always been a horse-crazy girl. So what seeds – and we’re kind of defining those as gifts, or a calling, personality, story – so what seeds do you see that God has given you to create the impact that you’re having?

Kim: Sometimes you have to walk in things before you really recognize what your seeds are. I don’t think God comes down and goes “Here’s your seed, here’s your calling.” I had to really step out in it, but I really think leadership is one of my gifts, and I think I have a really great ability to work with people, cast vision. That’s really my role now at Hope Reigns. I don’t run operations – I mean I’m the CEO, I oversee everything, but my role is really what we call a visionary. And so, I’m the one that meets with people, casts vision, talks with donors, works on our strategy and our future, and it’s so fun to really be able to work with the Lord. Obviously, there’s a lot of prayer that goes into that, but it’s really fun to be able to really feel in my gut like, “This is what I was born to do.”

Cheri: Just for the sake of our listeners, could you just describe, just briefly, what – if we were to come visit, what might we see happening when there’s kids that are interacting

with the horses? I think I have a tiny clue, but for those who have no idea what horse therapy involves – I mean, is it considered horse therapy what you're doing?

Kim: Well, we're not therapists so we don't call it horse therapy. We call it more mentorship.

Cheri: Ok.

So give us a little bit of a picture of what that might look like.

Kim: Absolutely. So there's so many things you can do with horses, and I think most people think, "Oh you ride them." Like, you just get on and you ride and then you get off. And what we really – our niche and what we're really teaching our kids is something called natural horsemanship. Our kids when they come to us – you guys, they are so emotionally and socially shut down. We're talking sexual abuse, we're talking all kinds of traumatic incidents that these kids have gone through, and so they don't trust anybody.

So when they first come, one of our core values at our ranch is about sharing our story, because we know that when we share our story, just like I'm sitting here sharing with you guys, it creates this beautiful space where people come and they feel like, "Wow, maybe it's safe for me to share my story, too." So when a child first comes to Hope Reigns, we actually take them on a tour. So we have this beautiful 33-acre ranch with this ginormous 4,000 square foot log cabin that looks like it's from Colorado, doesn't it Amy?

Amy: It does! It's gorgeous.

Kim: And we've got a herd of 15 horses that are kind of spread around, and a common area where we mostly hold our sessions – like a covered arena and an outdoor arena and everything.

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And so, when a child first comes we take them on a tour around the property, and we introduce them to the horses, and we share their story because all of our horses have a story of overcoming something. The majority of them have been abused, they've been rescued, some of them have health issues and maybe they weren't wanted anymore, and then, inevitably, as we're going around a child connects with a horse's story. Can I share one?

Cheri: Oh, please!

Kim: So we had a little girl who was rescued from sex trafficking. Her mom – this is in Lake County, Amy – people don't think that this happens and it happens everywhere – her mom was a heroin addict, and she trafficked her daughter to feed her heroin addiction. And when this little girl wasn't being trafficked, she was locked in the trunk of a car. So that was her existence. And she was rescued, and fostered, and then adopted. So she has an adopted mom who loves her and is a fierce, fierce advocate for her and brought her out to Hope Reigns and she got to meet Selah. And Selah is actually my horse, she's an American saddlebred – I grew up with an American saddlebred – who was rescued from starvation.

She was locked in her stall with no food or water. There were thirty horses in her barn, and by the time the rescue league got there, only 11 were alive. And they literally had to dig her out of her stall of her own excrement. That's how bad it was. And she struggles with major anxiety from that incident, you know what I mean, when she doesn't feel safe you can see her anxiety go up.

And so, we introduced this little girl to Selah's story, 'cause we don't look at this little girl and go, "I'm so sorry you were trafficked." We say, "Oh, let me introduce you to Selah." and we share her story. And the recognition that you can see in her eyes – and her mom was standing there, and this little girl said, "Well, nobody should be locked away. And nobody should be starved."

And her mom started to cry, you guys, because she was talking about herself. It was the very first time, and she's been in therapy, but it was the very first time she articulated what happened to her in this safe context, because she was talking about it based on what happened to Selah.

So that is kind of like the beginnings of where we start with the kids, and then from there we work on building relationship with the horse and their trained mentor. And then as they begin to trust their horse, they begin to trust their mentor, and it just kinda goes from there. And we do primarily on-the-ground games, just lots of fun things to really bond and connect with the horse, and then riding is kind of like the cherry on the top. You know, some of our horses can't be ridden, but most of them can.

So does that give you guys a good feel? I mean, they paint the horses, they groom the horses, it just kind of depends. And we're very oriented toward what our horse is feeling, because we don't want sour, unhappy horses. We want them to love their job, and that allows them to stay connected with these kids emotionally.

And we, you know, there's so many things to talk about why horses make great therapy partners but that's – sorry, you guys, I didn't mean to get so emotional!

Amy: We were crying too!

Cheri: That was perfect. Thank you so much.

Amy: It's a great picture! One of the things that you said the day I was at Hope Reigns was you said, "Horses don't heal children, Jesus heals children. But Jesus uses horses to heal children."

Kim: Yeah, absolutely.

Amy: I loved that. And there are so many stories in *Joey* – and so, you should get the book so you can see the whole picture! So tell us, in the last month, one “seize the yay” moment. A moment where God just showed up and filled you with joy. I know you have so many sad stories out there every day, and it must be really heavy to carry a lot of that, but you see these victories, too. So share a “seize the yay” moment with us.

Kim: Oh gosh, I can think of a couple.

Well, I got asked – so we do a mentorship program called Bloom and Build and it’s for our teenage girls. And we did a camp – we’re doing a camp this week, it’s called our Bloom camp for teenage girls, and our program manager asked me to come and speak and give my testimony. I have a real heart for teenage girls, because when I was a teenager I made a lot of mistakes I really regret because I was searching for love, so I have a real heart for helping them understand where their value comes from. So I came and gave a brief testimony, and one of the girls that was there is a young lady that’s been in our sessions for probably three years.

She was rescued, adopted from India, and when she was in India her parents rejected her and she lived out in the streets. And you just – you can’t even imagine the abandonment and the rejection that this child has been through, and her literally having to try to save herself living on the streets. She’s 14 now – I think she was 7 or 8 years old when this happened – and she got adopted by a really wonderful lady, but what happens a lot of times when kids get adopted in those situations, is once they start feeling safe they start acting out, right? And so, her anger issues are just ginormous, this young girl, and it’s very understandable.

But, as I was giving my testimony, and I was talking about where our worth – and asking questions about where do they put or seek their value, she spoke up and just went on and on about Jesus and how much He’s healed her, and how, you know, even giving her own testimony and talking about how she had been living on the streets but that she can look back and see how God was walking with her that whole time and keeping her, you know, physically safe. It was just unbelievable.

I just kind of cocked my head and went, “Oh. Ok.” You know, sometimes I just step back and go “Wow, ok. This is really working.” Do you know what I mean? So that was just a really surprising, beautiful moment, to listen to her give her testimony in front of these girls. I just stopped talking. I was like, “You go, girl!” So, it was really sweet.

Amy: Oh, wonderful example. Thank you so much for being with us, Kim, this was great – and I can’t wait to come for a Saturday tour!

Kim: Yeah, please do! And if people wanna check us out, our website is hopereigns.org, and again, the *Joey* book you can get on Amazon and anywhere. It’s about our blind rescued horse that helped a little girl who couldn’t speak, so, it’s a really sweet story.

Amy: Yeah, my book is tear-stained. [Laugh]

Cheri: We hope you’ve enjoyed episode 166 of Grit’n’Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules.

Amy: Head on over to gritngracegirls.com/epiosde166. There you’ll find our transcript, the Digging Deeper download, and a link to the Hope Reigns website.

Cheri: We are so excited to tell you what’s available now! It is the audiobook of *Exhale* and we got to read it! Amy, can you believe it?

Amy: [Excited sounds] I cannot believe it. I have told so many people. This is the only way this hick girl is ever gonna be paid to narrate anything.

Cheri: Ok, I’m just gonna let that fly, but yes.

[Amy laughs]

Cheri: The *Exhale* audiobook is available, we got to read it, and we are so thrilled. Check it out on Amazon or Audible or wherever you get your audiobooks.

Amy: Next week's seed-sender is Karen McNary whose personal story of bringing reconciliation everywhere she goes will give you one more set of seeds to look for in your own life.

Cheri: For today, grow your grit. Embrace God's grace. And when you run across a bad rule, you know what to do. Go right on ahead and

Amy 'n' Cheri: Break it!