

THIN PLACES

A TALE OF STRENGTH & HONOR FROM THE
WILD AT HEART ADVANCED BOOT CAMP
FRONTIER RANCH / BUENA VISTA, CO – DECEMBER 2010



“He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives, and release from darkness the prisoners.”

Isaiah 61:1

“And let me tell you something: you don’t escape spiritual warfare simply because you choose not to believe it exists or because you refuse to fight it.”

John Eldredge – Waking the Dead

PROLOGUE

In 2008 my masculine journey took an unexpected path when I discovered a book called *Wild at Heart* by John Eldredge. At the age of 46 I was no stranger to “men’s work,” having been involved with The ManKind Project® (MKP) for a period of time stretching from 1996 and my involvement in their *New Warrior Training Adventure™* (NWTa) to my stepping away from the organization in 2002.

While MKP certainly spoke to deeper parts of my masculine sojourn, it wasn’t until I had my heart freed by God in 2005 that my world as a man began to unravel and get completely turned upside down. In *Wild at Heart*, Eldredge invites men on a journey with God to recover their masculine heart and to discover the wholehearted and powerful man that was created in the image of God.

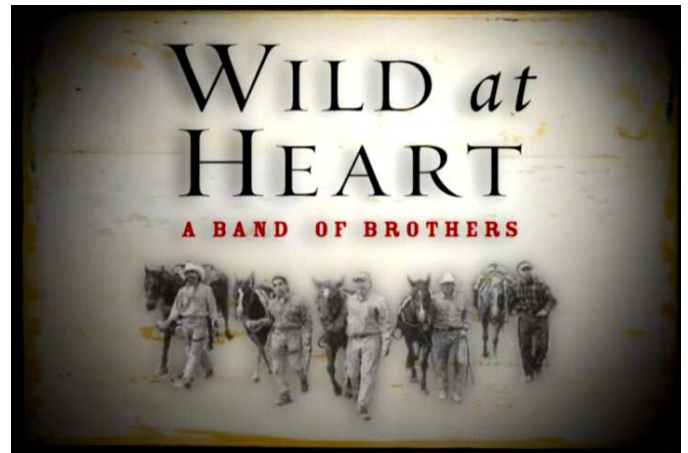


From the *Wild at Heart Boot Camp* (2009)
Crooked Creek Ranch – Fraser, CO

In the wake of reading *Wild at Heart*, I also ventured into the other books Eldredge had written: *The Sacred Romance* (with Brent Curtis), *Desire*, *Waking the Dead*, *Epic*, *Way of the Wild Heart* –

recently reissued as *Fathered by God*, *Captivating* (with his wife, Stasi), and *Walking with God*. In 2008, I also returned to men’s work in MKP full-time while taking my place in support of the WAH message.

In 2009 I led a book study of *Wild at Heart* for a group of 7 men prior to my traveling to Colorado to attend the *Wild at Heart Boot Camp*, a 4-day event that drew over 450 men from around the world to join John and his Ransomed Heart ministry team as they unpacked the deeper message of the book.



My walk with God, my masculine journey, my heart itself would never be the same. Understanding that deep in his heart every man longs for a battle to fight, an adventure to live, and a beauty to rescue was the prelude to answering the question for myself: “*Do I have what it takes?*”

I share with you a tale of strength and honor from my journey to the recent *Wild at Heart Advanced Boot Camp* and the “thin places” of where my heart was met by a Jesus more men are finding, especially within the walls of the modern day church.

John Fontaine – December 2010

THE CALL TO ARMS

My answer was simple:

“God, are you nuts? You have got to be kidding me, right?”

The question was a bit more complex:

‘Are you ready to come out to Advanced Boot Camp?’



Screen Capture from RansomedHeart.com

I cannot remember exactly when earlier this year I heard God’s voice asking me the question, but I certainly remember my feeling: **FEAR!** Yes, the kind of fear that shrivels certain parts of the masculine anatomy, a “pucker factor” way off the charts. Having experienced the *Wild at Heart Boot Camp* in 2009, I knew such an event was impactful...but had also come at such a high price.

Upon return from Crooked Creek Ranch in Fraser, CO last year, I was blindsided by an unfortunate split with the church leadership that I had sat under for over 4 years. That occurred in May of 2009...I spent the next 15 months walking without any church family, having taken on what John Eldredge, in his first book, *The Sacred Romance*, called “the Message of the Arrows.” In being shown the door by the church what I heard was, “*John, we don’t want you here and we certainly don’t want this message anywhere near our doors.*” That wound hurt, and the Enemy of my heart and my faith took full advantage of such a weapon. It almost took my heart all the way out.

So when in early 2010 I received God’s question in my heart about attending the *Advanced Boot Camp* to be held at Frontier Ranch in Buena Vista, CO in December, I clung to the only hope I had: “Well, God, I hear you...but...I’m still unemployed (since 2008)...there’s no money to go...and, besides, I probably won’t get chosen in the lottery...oh, and by the way, the last time hurt! I’ll probably take a pass on this, but thanks for asking.”

I forgot about it, but God didn’t forget about me. He pursued my heart and eventually led me to a new church home in Louisville (which was a journey in itself). He then started tugging on my heart to answer the original question: *‘Are you ready...?’* The Boot Camps have so many men from around the world wanting to participate that they hold a lottery system for men to be given spots. So, I entered the lottery...and the answer came back, “**You’re accepted!**” Oh man...another wall removed. So I took the next step and joined the Ransomed Heart ministry team in strategic prayer and invited hundreds of men I know to consider supporting me (in a number of ways or options) in pursuing this opportunity.

God, being God, showed up...God-sized! Almost immediately men stepped up to support me – through prayer and through financial assistance. Ransomed Heart offered a scholarship and quite a number of men in the ManKind Project stepped up to fill in the gaps. A few pastors at my new church, familiar with John’s books, were in my corner to experience what God had waiting and were encouraging to me to pursue it. All provision fell into place. It was God in my heart saying: “**I have a gift for you out there...one that only you can come and receive...one with your name on it that no one else can open.**” It was my call to arms.

THE OPPOSITION

In *Wild at Heart*, John Eldredge writes: “Every boy, in his journey to become a man, takes an arrow in the center of his heart, in the place of his strength. Because the wound is rarely discussed and even more rarely healed, every man carries a wound. And the wound is nearly always given by his father.” (2001: Thomas Nelson Publishers, p. 60)

Everything needed to attend the *Advanced Boot Camp* was in place by early November. And every part of my head, heart and soul knew what was coming next: **opposition from the Enemy!!**



Sunrise over the Rockies – Frontier Ranch in Buena Vista, CO
Wild at Heart Advanced Boot Camp – December 2010

The arrows did, indeed, start to fly against my heart and the event preparation itself: fear, a feeling of diminishment and a fog of self-destruction, disqualification, misunderstanding, even limits on Jesus and what He can do. In the weeks leading up to *Advanced Boot Camp* (ABC), I found myself disinterested at times, while during other stretches gripped by a sense that it didn't matter or that I was only fooling myself into believing that my presence at ABC would make a difference...to me or other men.

And then I realized something that was given to me at the first *Boot Camp* experience:

The attacks of the opposition will come in direct proportion against the good that God is leading me into. I must be doing something right if I am experiencing warfare on this intense level!!

In early November, I wrote these words in my journal:

“Lord, I belong to you. Teach me this day to be a better man, more so the man You created me to be...The message I'm hearing from the Enemy is, 'See, no one cares...' Father, what do you say?”

His answer was strong in my heart:

'Is it time?'

Time – time for what?



*The Eve of Departure for Wild at Heart Advanced Boot Camp
Louisville, KY - December 2010*

I had been in many crucibles before. I remained faithful. I walked through the fears. I prayed. I wept. I didn't give up on God because He hadn't given up on me. I packed my bags. I didn't back down or back off, no matter how the opposition came against me. Part of me knew that hundreds of men from around the world were going through a similar battle. **It was time...**and ready or not it was time to go find the gift waiting.

ON WINGS LIKE EAGLES

"...but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." (Isaiah 40:31)

When I went out to Boot Camp in 2009, it was the first time I had been on a plane in 28 years. I felt like a little boy, my face pressed against the window of the plane, squealing inside at the thrill of taking off and landing and amazed to be soaring above the world below as if on wings like eagles. Arriving at Denver International Airport (DIA) on Thursday morning, December 2nd this year, I knew what was waiting: **my brothers in arms!**



Brothers in Arms from Bronx, NY
Marco Benjoya and the author – Advanced Boot Camp 2010

As men arrived on flights from all over the United States, we gathered together inside DIA to meet and greet each other. Nearly 100 men were scheduled to ride the shuttle buses to the event. Only God could introduce two middle-aged warriors to one another who had grown up on the streets of the Bronx in New York City! Marco and I shared the 3-plus hour shuttle bus ride from DIA to Frontier Ranch, talking about our individual experiences with the *Wild at Heart* message and our individual battlefronts in the campaign to help God free the hearts of men. Having Marco by my side on the ride to camp was such a blessing and a powerful reminder that I was not alone...it was also a thing of beauty to hear our New York accents in harmony at the front of the bus as it drove on!

Men had already come from overseas to America in their journey to the camp. Men were already arriving at Frontier Ranch having driven themselves from points all across the map, either individually or in groups. And when the three shuttle buses pulled into camp, my heart began pulsating with a strength and excitement as I disembarked and made my way into a throng of men entering the Black Elk building at camp to pick up my information packet and receive my housing logistics.



The Fire Pit at Frontier Ranch – A Gathering Place for Men
Laughter, Tears, Good Cigars and Masculine Strength

And, suddenly, I was aware that more was at stake beyond the excitement of being there...

I was standing in line behind a man as we made our way towards the door of Black Elk...and he went down. He did not trip, was not pushed...he suddenly just, in slow motion, fell forward and hit the concrete face first. It was surreal. As I joined a few other men to step in for safety, the man – obviously dazed – started to come to, his nose bleeding from the impact. Some men, in their excitement, were oblivious to what was right in the field. A medic was summoned and the man was attended to, but I walked on once I knew he was safe realizing that, in fact, our gathering was not going to be a free pass of unlimited fun without a sense of danger. I remember thinking, "The Enemy has drawn blood. Stay focused!"

THE SHEPHERD'S VOICE

Frontier Ranch was filled with hundreds of men who had come from the ring, a gathering of gladiators, of fighters, of warriors. I looked around Kachina Lodge (where John Eldredge and his Ransomed Heart team would lead all of the teaching sessions during *Advanced*), not sure whether it was the high altitude buzz I was feeling in my head and heart or the instant camaraderie I experienced taking my place – rightfully – in such a line of men.



"I didn't always lose. I won't always lose again. I can still fight."

(Quote from the 2005 film "Cinderella Man")

On Thursday evening after we had arrived, unpacked, settled in and shared our first meal together, men gathered to go to work. And one of the first reminders I was given by Eldredge: **It's a dangerous world...the wolves definitely surround the sheep.** And there is a Shepherd whose Voice can, and will, lead me through the dangers and keep me safe.

In the first part of Chapter 10 in John's gospel, Jesus Himself talks about the shepherd's voice: *"He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice."* (10:3-4) Scripture goes on to say "...but they did not understand what he was telling them." (10:6) Jesus went on to warn them: *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."* (10:10) Sort of like the voice of a corner man for a boxer in the ring...

In boxing, the opponent – the enemy – comes into the ring. With a flock of sheep, the wolf – the enemy – can either hope for a stray to stop listening to the shepherd's voice and separate from the flock or else hope the watchman makes a mistake and leaves the door to the pen unprotected. It struck me: **Do I understand its warfare? Do I understand that any agreements I make giving the Enemy a foothold basically opens the door of my heart to attack?**

Eldredge spoke about that place in my heart that belongs to God, to my Father, where the Voice of the Shepherd is heard loud and clear...and that, as a man, I sometimes will allow other things in that place or be led astray by other voices that want to steal, kill and destroy the goodness in there. As a group of men gathered together to continue to fight, we prayed that all the agreements set against our hearts and against the *Advanced Boot Camp* would be broken and banished in light of God's covering and authority over our hearts. In my heart I could see the image of the Shepherd standing in front of the gate – our camp – and saying, "No, you will not enter" to the wolf circling outside.



The thief that comes to steal and kill and destroy...

So, if I'm not listening for...and listening to and following...the Shepherd's Voice, and if those places in my heart are not given to God and are ripe for the Enemy to come in and build footholds in with nothing but the intent to *steal and kill and destroy*, how then does the fight get out of my hands? How do I fight the Enemy's fight instead of the one that leads me to victory?

CONVERSATIONAL INTIMACY

"I call on you, O God, for you will answer me..." (A prayer of David, Psalm 17:6)

I love those conversations with someone where it's not necessary to "set the table," where I don't have to reintroduce myself or explain myself...the person simply knows me and knows where I'm coming from. I believe that's due to the *intimacy* of the relationship between me and that other person. Unfortunately, there are still times where I spend the words of my heart agreeing with what the Enemy is whispering to me rather than walking and talking in conversational intimacy with God.



Pause. Ask. Listen. Some Quiet Time in the Rockies.
Photo Credit: Marco Benjoya – Advanced 2010

For most of my life, I made agreements out of fear or self-determination, selfishness. Decades of making agreements that addiction to drugs and pornography was the only way to deal with being a man. As the saying goes, I was my own worst judge. I was always "telling myself" how wrong I've been, how much I've been blowing it. **Why would I doubt that God speaks to me?**

"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock," Jesus says in Revelation 3:20. **"If anyone hears my voice and opens the door..."** In John's gospel (10:4), we hear, "...and his sheep follow him because they know his voice..." In order for King David to defeat the Philistines, he had to stay in tune with the voice of God (2 Samuel 5:17-25). It really, for me as a man of faith, came down to a simple fork in the road – I was either going to be a man who kept surrendering to Jesus or a man who kept going about things his own way.

And it is in the conversational intimacy I have discovered with God that continues to open doors, give me a voice with which to fight the challenges and struggles of living out the masculine journey in a world designed to come against it, and keep a place in my heart where I can go to my Father with anything. It was a matter of taking time **(Pause)**, asking Jesus to come and hear the question I had **(Ask)**, and then be willing to hear the answer to the question **(Listen)**.



The Man Who Sat to My Left in Kachina Lodge
The author & Chuck Singleton – Advanced Boot Camp 2010

In his book *Waking the Dead* (2003, Thomas Nelson, Inc.), Eldredge talks about the set up that comes from the lies: *"Satan is called in Scripture the Father of Lie (John 8:44). His very first attack against the human race was to lie to Eve and Adam about God, and where life was found, and what the consequences of certain actions would and would not be. He is a master at this. He suggest to us – as he suggested to Adam and Eve – some sort of idea or inclination or impression, and what he is seeking is a sort of "agreement" on our part. He's hoping we'll buy into whatever he's saying, offering, insinuating. The Evil One is still lying to us, seeking our agreement every single day."*

How many agreements had I made? Did I really believe God could break them?

IMAGES FROM FRONTIER RANCH



Up the Hill

Frontier Ranch in Buena Vista, CO – December 2010

PHOTO CREDIT: Marco Benjoya



The Man Who Sat to My Right in Kachina

The author and Big Mark Mahan – Advanced Boot Camp

PHOTO CREDIT: John Fontaine



My Majestic Friend Inside Kachina Lodge

Mountain Lion at Frontier Ranch, December 2010

PHOTO CREDIT: John Fontaine



Do I Doubt That God Speaks to Me?

Images from Buena Vista, CO – December 2010

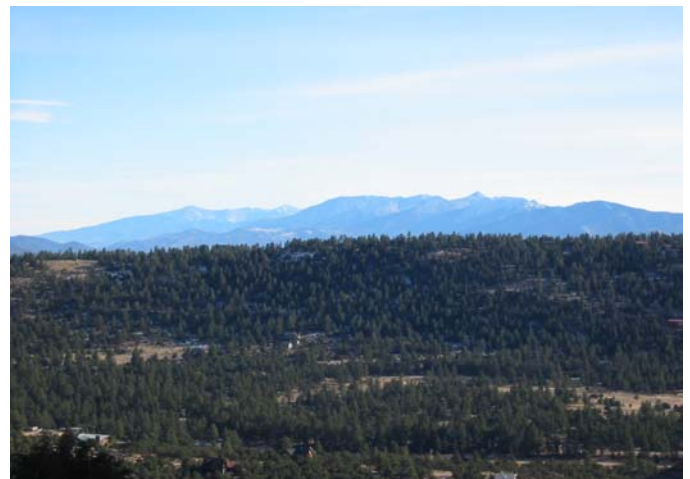
PHOTO CREDIT: Marco Benjoya



A Gathering of Men...Food Is Probably Involved!

Meal Time at Advanced Boot Camp, December 2010

PHOTO CREDIT: Marco Benjoya



A Gift with Only My Name on It...

View from Frontier Ranch – December 2010

PHOTO CREDIT: John Fontaine

INVITING GOD TO FIGHT FOR ME

If I am being trained as a warrior, do I fear the battle necessary to become the best warrior for God I can be?

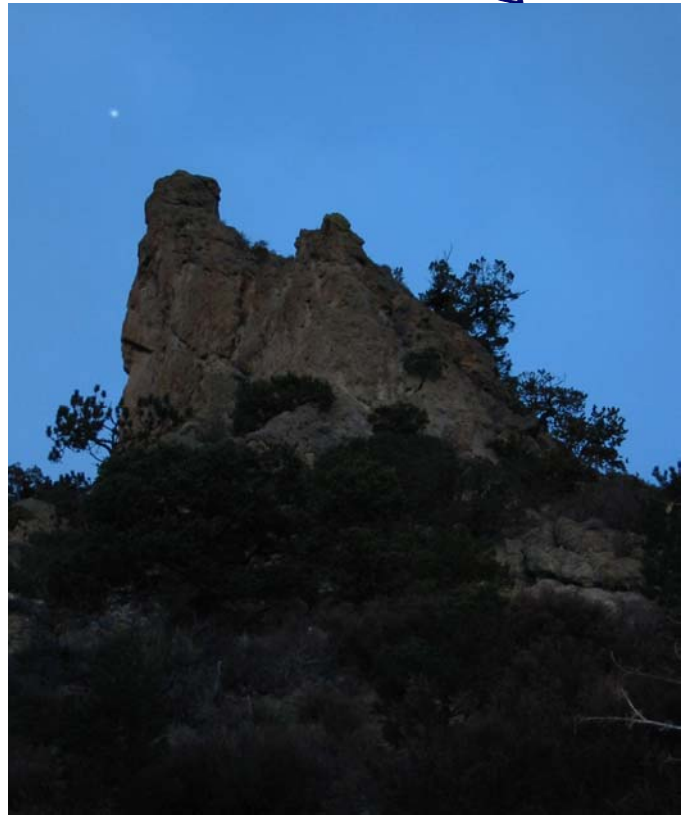
Friday morning for me at *Advanced Boot Camp* brought a sense of urgency that had chased me to sleep on Thursday night. During my original *Wild at Heart Boot Camp* experience back in late April/early May 2009 (Crooked Creek Ranch in Fraser, CO) I ended up being the last man standing at the fire pit early on Friday morning, somewhere past 2:30 in the morning. I couldn't wait then to get up before the dawn and wait for first sun so I could go hiking in the mountains.



**Crooked Creek Dawn – Wild at Heart Boot Camp
Fraser, CO – April 2009**

PHOTO CREDIT: Don Baunsgard

What these walks became for me was a way to invite God into my life...a chance to, even for a little while, be so alone with God that I had no choice but to feel under his training for battle. Find the trailhead for this Adventure was a bit different in each location, but while at *Advanced Boot Camp* I had scouted out my location up the hill at Frontier Ranch in the pitch black of Thursday night, the wind howling over the mountains surrounding camp, this intense fear pushing around all sides of me as I looked into the darkness at the path up the hills surrounding Mt. Princeton, knowing full well God was capable of leading me where I was scared to go.



**Friday Morning Training Ground – A First Dawn Hike
Wild at Heart Advanced Boot Camp – December 2010**

Bundled up in my winter gear (a brisk low 20 degrees, possibly colder with wind), I had been up since 4:30am, first one awake in Big Foot Room of Wotani Lodge, shaved and showered and ready to have a cup of coffee, some morning time in God's Word and journaling, and then watch the sunrise over the Rockies while talking to a man named Charlie Vernon from Florida.

I had come to *Advanced Boot Camp* with expectations and a story already up and running that I was going to meet Jesus on a deeper level. Charlie actually had a list of things he expected God to show up for – one was to meet me! He had been reading some of my online writings and had asked God to have us cross paths. We talked about what each of us had experienced on our separate *Boot Camp* experiences and about my work in the ManKind Project. As we drank coffee, took pictures of the dawn, and enjoyed the cold mountain air, I could hear God calling to me in my spirit to walk with him and go to a place of training. Morning and the mountain called. *It was time...*

ON THE MOUNTAIN

As a young boy growing up in New York City on the streets of the Bronx, I never really imagined what it would be like to walk alone in the wilds of a mountain, nothing to protect me but the hand and voice of God. In my original *Boot Camp* experience last year, I enjoyed a phenomenal hike in the wilds surrounding Crooked Creek Ranch, so high up that the wild geese were flying across the skies *below* where I was walking. This year, at Frontier Ranch, I picked up my trailhead from where I had stood before it in the pitch black the night before.



The Path Takes Me Higher...

Friday Morning Hike – Frontier Ranch – December 2010



The Objective – Mt. Princeton Looms

Friday Morning Hike – December 2010 – Frontier Ranch

Climbing up into the higher elevations of Mt. Princeton was the goal. It surrounded the camp in such a majestic and comforting way, pushing the eye upwards to the grandeur of it. As usual, as I entered the deeper part of the trailhead, I could feel God calling me deeper into fear.

Part of me wanted to go deeper into the wild of the mountain because I was fearful of God's call on my life. Part of me didn't want to go too far because I wanted to make it back for breakfast. Even that felt typical, like most of my life – something full of glory and something full of selfishness. I continued to climb, nearing the place where men would later climb to rappel off the cliffs and into the adventure. *I had another path to follow...*



A Path Less Clear...The Mountain Still Calls

Friday Morning Hike – Frontier Ranch – December 2010

Once again, the feeling I had coursing through my entire body was of God asking me to follow Him, trust Him...*completely*. And the fear I felt in moving up the mountain told me I could.

ON THE MOUNTAIN, II



Morning Arrives on the Mountain
Wild at Heart Advanced Boot Camp – December 2010

There was an aching feeling inside of me on that morning walk, that battle training hike with God before a hearty meal with my brothers at *Advanced Boot Camp*. There was something broken that so desperately needed healing. There was something in me that wanted to keep walking, keep climbing, and get away from it all and above it all, closer to something and far away from everything. There were no words, really. It was God asking me to come a bit further...a bit higher...yes, it's dangerous...something was at risk.

There was another part of me that knew I wanted to return...to turn...to become the man who would keep climbing no matter the fear. I began to hear God in that part of my heart. I stopped to look around where I had climbed to, the distant ridges of other mountains visible, my heart racing with the altitude adjustment and my own eagerness.

On the walk back, I met a man by the name of John. We both stopped on the top of a ridge near a main path leading back down the mountain and towards Frontier Ranch the way I came into the trailhead. As we talked, John had moved back a few steps and began to lose balance. I grabbed him (twice!) and brought him back to balance near the decline where the path down started.



Heading Back for Breakfast
Friday Morning Hike – Mt. Princeton – December 2010

That's why I came to the mountain – it was dangerous!! And walking back with John I realized that God always brought someone to my path for a purpose I couldn't understand – but more so to let me know I'm not alone...and that I'm needed.



Off the Mountain in One Piece
John Schafer (l.) and the author – Advanced Boot Camp

WORSHIP AND WARFARE

If the warrior is trained in battle, I wondered as I took my place in Kachina Lodge on Friday morning after breakfast, Chuck to my left (along with Nate, along with Kevin Kirsch – a man I shared the 2009 *Wild at Heart Boot Camp* experience with at Crooked Creek) and Big Mark to my right, I began to feel like the character actor Jet Li played in the film, *Fearless*.



To Be the Best Warrior Takes Resolve
Movie Still from "Fearless" starring Jet Li

John Eldredge and the Ransomed Heart Team of Craig McConnell, Bart Hansen, and Morgan Snyder were present to lead us nearly 400 men (having begun the process the night before) through a full day...and worship was to be a part of every session. We prayed and we worshipped, and the power in the room incredible to feel from the archetype of the warrior in my masculine heart.



The Place Where Hundreds of Warriors Came to Learn
Kachina Lodge at Frontier Ranch – December 2010

For me, the song "Everything" by Tim Hughes became an anthem starting off some additional teaching by John and his team around *Wild at Heart* and material from another of Eldredge's books, *Waking the Dead*.

As with my post-*Boot Camp* tale told in 2009 (May 12, 2009 at www.hisgraceamazing.blogspot.com), I have no intention of offering a nuts-and-bolts look at what the *Advanced Boot Camp* was in its entirety. But as we moved into Friday's morning session, John began to talk about the "agreements" that was referred to back in the "Conversational Intimacy" portion of this tale. I already knew, from life experience, that the Enemy takes the truth and weaves it together with the lie to make, for his purposes with me, an easy way in and an impossible way out.



How Many Agreements Have I Made with the Enemy?
Breaking Agreements (for the Good) Must Have Intentionality

This is where I was also glad to have spent time in God's Word over the past 5 years. Scripture is clear that my authority is in Christ...and that the Enemy wages war against all the followers of Christ. But the Enemy has no rightful claim over me...that belongs to God in His sovereignty, in His Son's reign as Lord, and in the protection of the Spirit that seals me in Him. *I am to expect the warfare against my heart.*

WARFARE AND HEALING

The rest of the morning session was about going to war for our hearts through prayer and actively seeking through connection to God a breaking of the “agreements” that the Enemy would use to keep me from answering God’s call upon my heart and my life.

Direct confrontation against these “agreements,” especially through prayer, is one of the most effective ways to fight the day-to-day spiritual assaults against my heart.



**The author holding Andúril, the Flame of the West
Wild at Heart Advanced Boot Camp – December 2010**

Many questions rose in my heart: *Do I have the resolve needed here? Am I ready to let God initiate me more deeply on my masculine journey? Was I willing to stay in battle, not get discouraged, and not create footholds for the Enemy?* With the sword in my hands, I felt the assuredness of being able to take out all distractions. As Gandalf said, “The board is set. The pieces are moving.”

Healing was one of the reasons I came to Frontier Ranch. I wanted those parts of my heart, those wounded places, to heal...or at least get a sense that the beginning of a healing process was underway. That was one of the most amazing things about being in this place with these men for this time – the sense that even the air was calling out the courageous in each breath!



**The Warriors at the Top of the Mountain
A View from Frontier Ranch – Buena Vista, CO – Dec. 2010**

As the Friday morning session took shape, John continued leading us men deeper into prayer, a journey of healing where God was invited to go back to a very young time in me – there was no other way to explain it except that it felt like God wanted to have a conversation with an 8 year old. *Interesting...*

And there was a power I felt in the room, the collective sensing and experiencing breakthrough in themselves and all around them. In men’s work I had discovered the power associated with a man (whether myself or others) going back to a place of woundedness not to stay there or be hurt again but to be led, by God, into deep and sure restoration and redemption and healing. I knew that there was a part of me that *refused* to come out of hiding, like a little boy (or how much like Adam hiding in the Garden of Eden), but how constantly I forget how patient God is with me. This session, I can see, is taking me into that unexpected place I had known was going to show up...*somehow...*

THE BOY AND THE MOUNTAIN

It was that little boy part of me that wanted to go back to the mountain...back to the place the hike before breakfast took me...the place God would be waiting to call me ahead through the fear...



The Return to Mt. Princeton
A Friday Afternoon Hike Back into the Mountain

Men were going rappelling. It was something I had seen done in the *Wild at Heart Band of Brothers* DVD series. I'm terrified of heights and could never imagine willingly going off the edge of a cliff hundreds of feet up. But here I was going off into the adventures of the wilds with a very young boy in the lead, climbing great heights along the paths...and *I wasn't sure if that was the wisest move.*

This young part of me was looking for something, someone. As I knew, when I got to that point where the morning hike had ended, I could sense an apprehension. I wasn't sure which part of me was feeling it – the little boy who was trying to avoid God or the adult part of me that sensed that danger is a part of the mountain. But it was interesting that I could sense that young man not too happy with God was willing to get behind me and let the adult lead the way. And the walk ahead was full of everything I wasn't sure was going to show up!!

I knew the walk ahead was part of the gift...



Upwards the Path Goes, Unmarked, Dangerous...
A Friday Afternoon with the Little Boy – Frontier Ranch

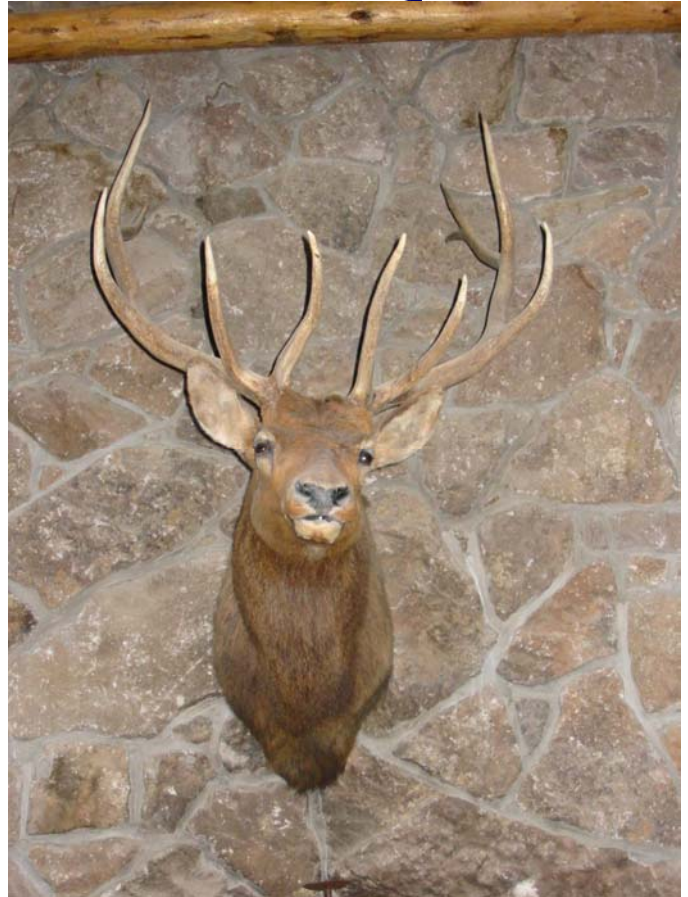
Knowing that our journey was climbing higher, I began to invite God more and more into my steps. A Ranger, much like Aragorn from *The Lord of the Rings*, I felt the elements around me, the possibility of meeting a mountain lion like the one staring at me in Kachina Lodge, perhaps spotting the elk whose call I heard earlier. And there was a part of me, in a brokenness that was all too familiar and nonetheless heavy and burdensome, that I wanted God to come deeper into that wounded part of me to heal it.

As I continued to climb, I could feel more and more of God in me, and it began to fill my chest with a surge of strength, even with the strenuous pace of my hike. The uneven footing felt so familiar, like rugged terrain I could cover with a blindfold on. And God was leading me into the places I didn't know, and had fear of. It was as if He was asking me to let Him heal me.

IMAGES FROM THE JOURNEY



A Smile from the Heart
Hiking on Friday Afternoon – Frontier Ranch, December 2010



The Majestic Resident on the Black Elk Wall
One of Many Faces of God's Glory at Frontier Ranch



Bob Rouse, Going Over the Cliff – YEAH!!
A Friday Afternoon Rappelling at Frontier Ranch



Black Elk Lodge – A Great Place to Journal Before Dawn
Frontier Ranch – December 2010



Men Gathered at Frontier Ranch Fire Pit
A Great Place for Stories, Cigars, and Good Fellowship

THE BOY AND THE MOUNTAIN, II

The trail up the mountain led me to a place where I felt alone, almost a part of the mountain in that I had nothing surrounding me but the life of the mountain itself, the trees, the wind, the cold, the animals I couldn't see, the ground under me, the rocks, the dirt, the snow and ice. It was a place that I was feeling a need to sit and let wrap around me.



A Quiet Place – A Part of the Mountain
Mt. Princeton – Frontier Ranch – December 2010

There had been a phrase in my journaling leading up to coming to *Advanced Boot Camp*. I kept hearing the words, “Is it time?” This question kept coming back and forth to my heart. I didn't know what to answer. It felt like it was a very young voice asking me, as a grown up, a very important question:

“Are you ready to step up and claim the man He made you to be?”



It was like asking God to walk right into the middle of where everything hurt the most...and feeling His love spread over everything that hurt. It wasn't like I wanted to leave that little boy part of me behind, but he was ready to watch me go ahead and grow up so I could become the man he always wanted to be. *And God, as He tends to do, had something else to ask of me. The day is young...*

Like my time at Crooked Creek last year, I did not want to come off the mountain...I wanted to stay on top of it, climbing, exploring, being a part of the danger. *But the time had come for all of me to take the return trip off the mountain and back to camp.* That young place in my heart had some fear – the climb up was, indeed, dangerous at some places, so I knew the way down wasn't going to be easy, either. But I noticed, almost immediately as I started the trek back down, that those broken places in my heart – those places the “boy” in me still hurt – were asking God to come into them: *“Jesus, come to the boy inside of me and heal me in this place.”*



The Return to Camp – A Path Less Traveled
Friday Hike at Advanced Boot Camp – December 2010

On the walk down I found myself stumbling, not sure, somewhat timid and feeling like the path itself was trying to trip me up, take me out. Old fears and younger parts that wanted nothing to do with them surfaced. *I remember feeling the fear of being alone.* And, of course, just when I needed Him the most, God shows up...

A MAN AMONG MEN

“We’ve been looking for you!”

The trek down the mountain on my way back to camp was, I found, more challenging and a bit more dangerous than I anticipated. There was no trail, plenty of slippery slopes and steep grades and this whisper of doubt that I was going to make it to safer ground without taking a nasty fall.



Brothers on the Mountain

Ron Williams (l.) and the author – ManKind Project Brothers

Having found the end of a trail that had brought me further up the mountain, I started to gain momentum in my pace but the ground itself was sketchy at best...some snow, a little ice, not optimal footing on the dirt and stones. *“O God,”* I recall saying aloud, *“I could use a little help here.”*

I tried keeping balance, one eye on the path and another on the steep drop-off to my right. Suddenly, I heard the voices of men ahead. My eyes looked through the trees ahead towards a bend approaching and saw what looked like the presence of two men. In that moment I slipped, my tired legs moving towards the right of the path (meaning towards the drop off). I lunged at the trunk of a nearby tree and instead of taking hold of it I used it as a carom, pushing myself back in momentum towards the path itself, doing this crazy and very ungraceful dance across the snow, ice and stones. Without falling, I regained balance and maneuvered around the bend into the presence of two men. Out of breath, I introduced myself to them.

“Hey, guys,” I said, “I’m Johnny Fontaine.” Both of them looked at each other and began to laugh – I mean really deep, amused laughing. *OK, I thought, that’s odd.* “What’s so funny?” I asked them.

One of the men, his eyes smiling and his face beaming, introduced himself and his friend saying, “I’m Chris Bobkowski and this is Ron Williams. We’re from the ManKind Project Chicago...*and we’ve been looking for you!!*”



Men Among Men – ManKind Project Brothers

Author (l.), Chris Bobkowski (c.) & Ron Williams (r.)

As a member of the ManKind Project of KY (www.kentucky.mkp.org) I had been talking to one of the men who will be on Staff with us for the *New Warrior Training Adventure* in March 2011 (a 3-day experiential initiatory journey for men) prior to coming out to *Advanced Boot Camp*. He had mentioned to me that he thought a fellow MKP Chicago man, Ron Williams, might be traveling out to Colorado. The dots remained unconnected until God put them together. Both Ron and Chris, friends of Jim Carey (no, not the comedian) in the Chicago Center of the ManKind Project, had come to Frontier Ranch with the intention of finding me.

So there on the mountain, we were men among men...brothers in several circles...sharing the paths of the masculine archetypes God created and placed in us. And it was yet another sign that I was in the right place at the right time.

THE BOY BECAME A MAN

On Friday afternoon, Eldredge was ready to instruct us, as men, of the mission ahead: *To go into battle, as a band of brothers, through prayer and intercession, for the heart of one man.*

Upon arrival at Frontier Ranch, I was assigned a bed in the Wotani Lodge, the Big Foot room. When I got checked in and dropped my gear and began to unpack on Thursday, I got to meet the other nine men in the cabin: Kevin, Mark, Porter, Mark (also known as “Sarge”), Mark (also known as “Marco”), Mark (also known as “Big Mark”), Gerry, Jason, and Bob (who I had actually met and spent some time talking with back at Denver International Airport).



The Wotani Lodge at Frontier Ranch
Wild at Heart Advanced Boot Camp – December 2010

As the session unfolded and John began to tell us what he was asking us to do, I began to sense a fear in my stomach. One of the men in Wotani with me, Mark Mahan, was sitting next to me during the entire weekend during the teaching sessions with Eldredge and his team. I remember turning to him and sensing, in both of us, a fear about the unknown. Eldredge set up some guidelines for entering into intercessory prayer and then asked us to go off in essential silence back to our Lodge space and cabin rooms. As I had experienced in many men’s circles over a number of years, I knew that one man was going to be invited into the center, into a chair, a *hot seat* of sorts.

Once in the room with the others, I began to feel myself wanting to not be there. We arranged ourselves in a large circle, some sitting, some standing. An empty chair was placed in the center. At first, I found myself standing but as we began to pray and ask God who it was He wanted to go to war for here in this room, I began to feel this intense heat in and all around my body, which naturally began to move towards the ground to the point where I found myself kneeling.



A Band of Brothers – Men in the Thick of Battle
Learning to Trust Men to Have My Back...

During my silence, I heard another man’s name. Several men heard mine...and I remember thinking, “Oh, great...I knew it...*me.*” And, from my years in men’s work and Eldredge’s instructions, I could pass on it if I didn’t want to experience it. It was here I again heard God’s earlier message: **Is it time?**

And so I took my place in the chair. It was like taking a fall and trusting that someone was going to catch me. I had never asked men to pray over the weaker areas of my heart before. In my life I still had thorns that provided much challenge and sometimes pain. I had fought many battles in life on my own. What God was asking me, I suddenly knew, was to finally trust Him to this point where only He could make a difference.

So the battle began...and men prayed...and I could feel a brokenness that needed God to heal. I could still feel the heat...and the fight, it didn’t take me long to realize, was on.

THE BOY BECAME A MAN, II

During the most intense moments of the men praying for ancient agreements in my heart to be broken, I remember feeling that “little boy” in me begin to feel as if it were time for someone else to step up. In my mind’s eye, I could see images of Aragorn from *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. A Ranger, a Warrior, a Lover, a King.



Strider – Aragorn – The King
Does God really see me as a man like this?

And, what seemed to be like a whisper from God in my heart saying, “*John. You are John. The time for Johnny has passed. You are John.*”

One of my earliest expectations of what I sensed God wanted me to get from coming out to the *Advanced Boot Camp* was that there was a gift to be given, one that only I could open – one with just *my name on it*. It was as if the younger part of my heart – the boy – became a man with the bestowing of this honor, this new name, the man’s name.

The men also asked me if I could sense God giving me a new hero’s name. I smiled, again the name like a whisper in my heart but this time more intense, like a drumbeat. “*Aragorn*,” I said, knowing that there were those parts of me I saw in the goodness and the honor through all the hardship and suffering he bore. To have been shown these gifts of affirmation, *of fathering*, was immense. I got up from the seat knowing that the boy – feeling lighter, feeling free – had become a man.



Another Morning Sunrise with God
Advanced Boot Camp – December 2010, Frontier Ranch



A Walk at Dawn – Nice and Chilly and Beautiful Rising Sun
Frontier Ranch – Advanced Boot Camp – December 2010

A DEEPER LOOK AT THE POSER



**The Poser Comes from the Agreements Made to the Wound
Would God Go With Me Back Into the Wound to Heal It?**

One of the best parts of the *Wild at Heart Boot Camp* I attended in 2009 was experiencing the other members of the Ransomed Heart Team lead different sections of teaching time during the weekend. Saturday morning at *Advanced* was led by Craig McConnell, a long-time friend and ministry partner of John Eldredge. Craig began by reminding us of something King David himself said about Christ: “Better one day in Your court than a thousand elsewhere.” *Yet there is something that gets in the way of integrity in living with Christ.*

The Poser...this is the part of me, the personality as such, that is a well-constructed approach to living that reflects my holiness *and* sin...and I am not honest in looking at it. In *Wild at Heart*, Eldredge describes the Poser as that part of masculinity that comes online because of the earlier Wound. In compensating for the damage done by the Wound, a man will make an agreement to not be in that same situation again. As he was teaching on Saturday, McConnell reminded me that it took both repentance and healing to move away from the Poser in my masculinity. The process of understanding assumptions, loving with an open heart, and changing relational style were crucial.

My sin is much deeper than my behavior: *What's the motive?* McConnell shared how his recent health issues, including a diagnosis of leukemia, had made him more aware of the importance of living moments from the balance of joy in God and authenticity to himself as a man and how that compared to the past where he would battle, as he felt most men do, those times where “superficial” living sometimes leads to the counterfeit of the Poser

The life I most deeply desire is only found in Christ: *Do I realize there is a mystery that I long for and that it requires me to engage it?* Do I simply settle for the “counterfeit” in me? Am I settling for “giving up” in me? McConnell, through some very deep, emotionally charged, honest sharing about his life and faith in God during this season, offered an encouragement to remember that loving God, ourselves, and other wholeheartedly is one of the ways the connection is made to the relationship Christ wants with me.



**Craig McConnell – Ransomed Heart Ministry Team
Screen Capture from “Wild at Heart Band of Brothers” DVD**

As the morning session was getting ready to break, McConnell closed with a question related to repentance and to know that it is “present tense.” He gave us men a question to take to God: “*Why do I need to sell others on who I am instead of being filled with the love and acceptance that You have of me?*” In other words, why do I go to the Poser, to the false, to the counterfeit instead of realizing the pictures that God wants to fulfill in my life for me. Believe me... I am not comfortable with that push/pull between me and God.

CALLING AND DESIRE

It was just a day into my new journey as *John*...and a part of me, as a man, had come to Colorado in response to a deeper calling from God in response to living out my own Mission: **To manifest the glory of God by going to war for my heart and the hearts of others.** As the journey continued, I knew that our next guide from Ransomed Heart, another long-time member of the Team named Bart Hansen, would have some interesting and powerful insights into the realms of *calling* and *desire* as to how God was raising me up into deeper levels of masculine initiation – and inviting me into the challenging and scary territory of honoring the desires He places into my heart.



Bart Hansen – Ransomed Heart Ministry Team
Frontier Ranch – Buena Vista, CO – December 2010

Bart had been extremely encouraging to me throughout my 2009 *Boot Camp* when I spoke to him about my fears in walking deeper with God into the sometimes unseen paths of His calling to me. Even leading up to *Advanced Boot Camp*, it was a phone call from Bart one day in response to an e-mail I had sent that was a major factor of encouragement to my heart to follow through on God's calling to come out to Colorado once again. *God calling me, good men calling me.* And the words of Jesus were in the field: **“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks the door will be opened.”** (Matthew 7:7-8) What did God desire for my heart?

During his Saturday morning session, Hansen invited us men deeper into the conversation about God's desires for our hearts. He talked about God **being in control of my desires and that He will change my desire.** It was amazing to see Bart, dealing with chronic health issues of his own related to pain, shared amazing personal stories of how God continued to build his character through the adversities of his life. Hansen also asked us a good question: *“Do I give room or allow God to do this?”*



Am I Ready to Get the Call? Is My Desire on Fire?
Movie Still from “The Rookie” starring Dennis Quaid

One of the things I appreciate about Bart Hansen is his balanced wisdom, his fierce honesty about his own shortcomings, and the amazing grace that God has shown him. He sent us off into the long afternoon to ponder a few questions with God:

“Can I see my calling in my Mission(s) – even the ones I disliked?”

“How have my desires changed? Is God up to something?”

Where is the adversity in my life? What is my reaction to adversity? Am I moving toward or away from it? What is God growing in me through adversity?”

I went off into the beauty and grandeur of Frontier Ranch, very quiet, listening deeply. There were parts of me very ready to hear God's answers to my asking Him about my calling and desires.

IMAGES FROM ADVANCED 2010



John Eldredge – Author of *Wild at Heart*
Wild at Heart Advanced Boot Camp, December 2010
PHOTO CREDIT: Marco Benjoya



The Fierce Eyes of Desire
Kachina Lodge – Frontier Ranch – Buena Vista, CO



Men Called to God's Glory
Watching the Cold Day Begin – Frontier Ranch, Dec. 2010
PHOTO CREDIT: Marco Benjoya



A Man Named John...
Wild at Heart Advanced Boot Camp, December 2010

WORSHIP AND REST

Even though Saturday night was still steak and potatoes night in the wonderful Mantee Lodge (where nearly 400 men ate during the *Advanced Boot Camp*), along with a movie to be shown in Kachina ("The Rookie"), Eldredge invited us into a post-dinner session that was designed for worship.



Wild Men, Full Stomachs
Mantee Lodge – Advanced Boot Camp, December 2010

It's quite a powerful feeling to be in a beautiful space such as Kachina Lodge, to hear the heartbeats of nearly 400 men as we are led in prayer before sharing some great worship music together. During part of my worship time on Saturday night, I wrote a short letter to God in my *Advanced Boot Camp* notebook:

"Lord Jesus –

Everything I ever wanted I've found in You! I need You – every step of the way!

This time is almost over at Frontier Ranch. This assembled Band of Brothers, warriors to the core, are ready to be shipped back to the front lines under Your command. None refuse, no matter the cost. I come to You, Jesus, for my orders...

WHERE DO YOU NEED ME TO FIGHT?

I am not the same man – going 'back' but not yet 'home.' Jesus, go before me and prepare the way. You are my only reason for living, for loving, for fighting for hearts, and for dying."

My heart was also able to hear many great advance words from God about some of the battle lines I myself would be shipped back to. Most of the rest of the evening was spent back with my Band of Brothers at Wotani Lodge...all of the Colorado mountain air and hiking had given me plenty of reasons to rest, along with the early mornings getting up before the sunrise. It was great sharing stories and laughing with the men as I recognized the bittersweet feeling of knowing, as I began to pre-pack my bags ahead of getting up on Sunday morning, that the end of *Advanced Boot Camp* was now drawing near.



As Iron Sharpens Iron, So One Man Sharpens Another
Jason Newell (l.) and author at Advanced Boot Camp



God Knows How to Make Friends
Charlie Vernon (l.) and author at Advanced Boot Camp

THE FELLOWSHIP NOW ENDS

Sunday morning at *Advanced Boot Camp* was about more worship, and I found myself intently listening to the music. “Everything” by Tim Hughes had played over the course of the weekend, becoming an unspoken theme song to me. And then Eldredge took to the stage in Kachina Lodge and began to talk about *listening to God* in terms of achieving breakthrough from the resignation and cynicism that creeps in from continued warfare.

The realization was that God will prepare me to suffer for Him, so I must be prepared for those battles. He mentioned the apostle Paul, surely a model of suffering for Christ following an astounding conversion experience. But Eldredge showed discernment by speaking to both **avoidable** and **unavoidable suffering**.



Leaving the Beauty Behind
Frontier Ranch – Buena Vista, CO – December 2010

Avoidable Suffering: These are places in my life where I really didn’t ask...pause...listen to what Jesus is trying to say to me – through the Word, through the Spirit. These are places where I surrender self-determination and my foolishness in order to develop my character. These are places where it is wise to avoid warfare, refuse to fight. Most importantly, these are battles that I’m *not supposed to take on* – a danger that is unique to skilled warriors.



Sunday Morning Breakfast With the Band of Brothers
Kevin Weber (l.) and author at Advanced Boot Camp

Unavoidable Suffering: These are the places where people I love are going through suffering. Eldredge talked about “the dignity of causation,” and said that God granted this to all...both good men and fallen angels. Some of the final thoughts he passed on to us were about being careful how the suffering was interpreted – and above all else keep breaking agreements, pursuing breakthrough in Jesus, and sharing in the fellowship of his suffering. *The fellowship...* I thought about all the strong and courageous men I had been meeting over the past four days and my heart began to see that the only measure of sustaining grace I had in life was *everything in Him*. Jesus knows, He understands the cost of bringing the kingdom of God. And all of what He had brought me through the *Advanced Boot Camp* experience was to have more of me belong to more of Him.

HUMANITY AND TRUENESS

Like with the tale I told of my journey to the *Wild at Heart Boot Camp* in 2009, I won't share much about the final session Eldredge held for the hundreds of men in Kachina Lodge. Even as this tale is put to print, I still find it hard to lose the intensity of coming to observe and understand **the humanity of Jesus**. It seems as if that, too, has been lost on the church – both historical and modern – to the detriment of deeper, personal relationship to Christ and true redemption in spirit, mind, and body.



Men Soon to Set Off to Different Corners of the World
Henk van Veluw (l. from the Netherlands) and author

After the final session, it was a strange dance of hurriedness and humility. Men gathered luggage and shared goodbyes much in the manner, I suppose, of men shipping out for battle. *Advanced Boot Camp* was over and it was time to head off into the winds of warfare and worship. The ride back to Denver International Airport on the shuttle bus was bittersweet: I had promised to look for a man named Henk from the Netherlands who needed some assistance at DIA in exchanging a ticket for an earlier flight or else coming with me to where I was staying overnight to book a room. In the hustle and hurriedness of the shuttle bus drivers leaving Frontier Ranch, I could not find Henk in the throng of nearly 400 men zipping about as the journey came to its end. My conversation with Marco Benjoya continued as we ate lunch on the bus and settled in to the realization that the majesty of God was now going to be unpacked in the heart.



Sunday Morning at Frontier Ranch – God's Kiss Goodbye
The author at sunrise – December 5, 2010

During the second part of the bus ride back to DIA, Marco took an empty seat further back and I stretched out, watching the amazing scenery pass by and allowing God to run my thoughts further up into the air, much like a squealing boy as he takes hold of a kite his father started into the air. I had gotten too many gifts; it seemed too many to pack with me in my heart. A new first name: John. A new Band of Brothers, nine men – much like the Fellowship of the Ring. A healthier understanding and respect for the spiritual warfare that was not going to go away just because I didn't think it existed. And, most of all, the gift of seeing the Jesus IN me, the ongoing, intimate presence of God with me and in me, in the way I become the man I'm supposed to be. That's all that I desire in living out my Mission: to go to war for my heart and the hearts of others so they can achieve God's glory designed in them.

I was traveling in thin places, those places where God is closer than before, almost without fear, without doubt. On the masculine journey, it is crucial to understand that God, as father, and Christ, as brother, along with Spirit, as counselor, all join with me in an amazing journey that I cannot – nor do not – take alone. And so it goes, as the journey continues, that I find myself once again on the path of God's call into the wildness of my heart.

IMAGES FROM THE PATH



Monday Morning in Denver

The author before heading back to KY – December 6, 2010



Learning to Live from the Four Streams

PHOTO CREDIT: *Marco Benjoya*



Tennessee and Kentucky – Brothers in Regional Arms
Nate Morrow (l.) and author – Advanced Boot Camp

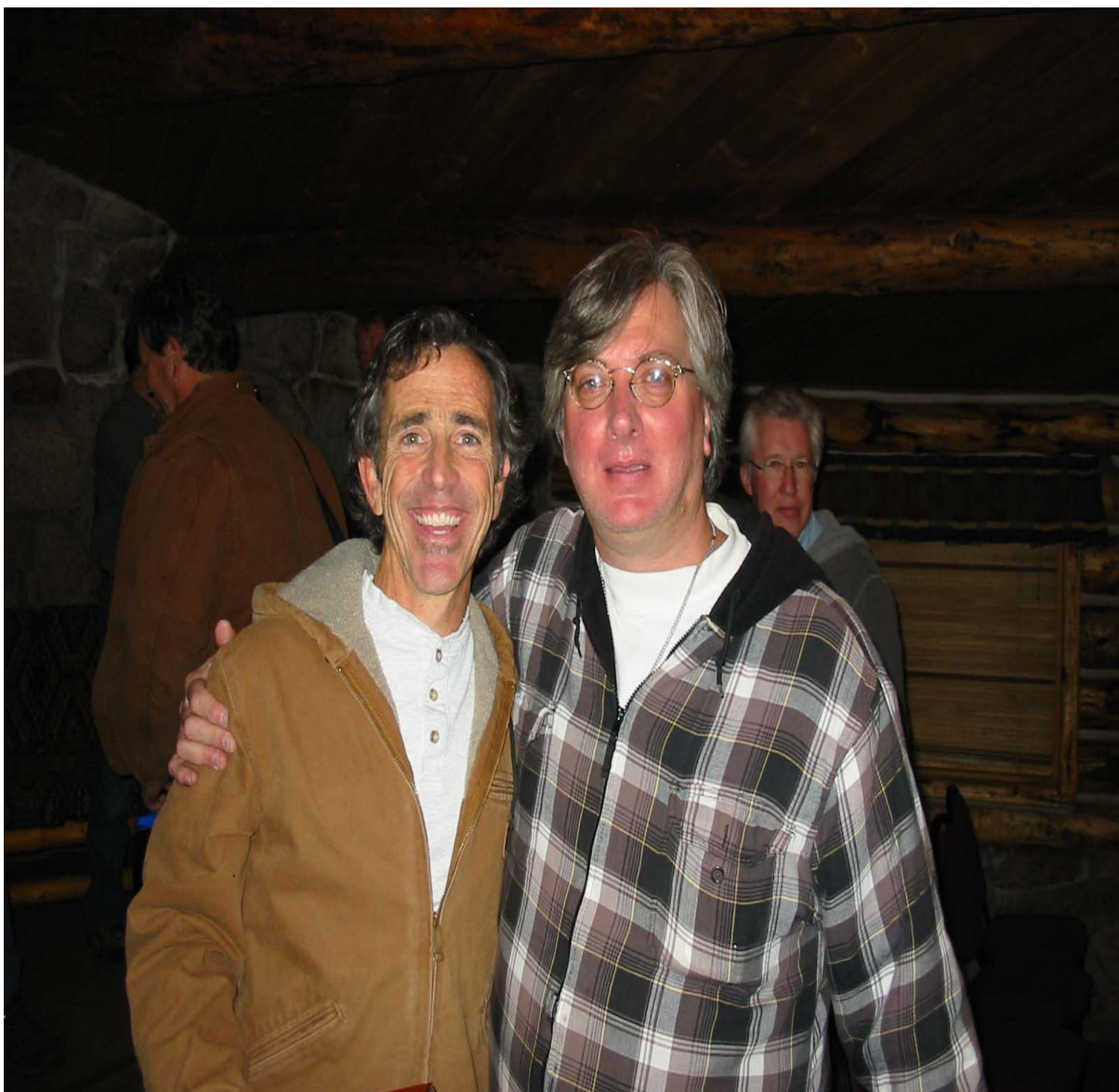


Black Elk Lodge, Frontier Ranch

PHOTO CREDIT: *Marco Benjoya*

BLESSINGS AND GRACE

There are many people to thank, all of whom, I believe, God sent to me in a season of great challenge and huge growth on my masculine journey. I have a list of men and women who prayed over this journey and contributed – both financially and with ally support – who have my many prayerful thanks and blessings for the grace demonstrated. I especially want to thank John Eldredge and Ransomed Heart Ministry for the support and encouragement to attend the *Wild at Heart Advanced Boot Camp*. I highly recommend this book and event to all men seeking a deeper and more powerful relationship with the God who created them in His image for His glory. Stay fierce! Stay in the Battle! Seek the Adventure! See the Beauty!



Brothers in the Battle for the Hearts of Men
John Eldredge (l.) and John Fontaine – Wild at Heart Advanced Boot Camp

DEDICATION

There have been times in my life where I have experienced the close fellowship and courageous spirit that marks journeys of masculine initiation. My time spent at the *Wild at Heart Advanced Boot Camp* at Frontier Ranch in Buena Vista, CO in December 2010 was not without the privilege and honor of being part of the Band of Brothers spending the 4 days in the thick of teaching, searching, worship, and warfare training.



The Sons of Thunder – The Band of Brothers at Advanced – One Platoon, Many Battlefronts
(Kneeling) Mark Mahan; (First Row Start L.) Bob Rouse, Mark Hollingsworth, Kevin Weber, Mark Mathews, Gerry Smuk, Clyde Porter; (Back Row Start L.) John Fontaine, Jason Newell, Mark Williams.

For more information on **John Eldredge and Ransomed Heart Ministries®**, go to:
www.RansomedHeart.com

For more information on the **ManKind Project®**, go to:
www.mkp.org

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