



# Christian Encounter NEWSLETTER

## STUDENT PROFILE

### Joseph J. (JJ)

When JJ was in the fifth grade, he received the news of his father's passing. He had only ever seen his father face to face twice in his life. Though not invited, JJ and his mother attended the memorial service, and JJ grieved the loss of a man he never got to know.

In his seventh grade year, classes went all virtual due to the pandemic, and JJ was relegated to his bedroom day in and day out. The months of isolation became oppressive.

"[The following] summer I had gotten involved in smoking and drinking. At first it felt freeing, because I had so much anger, sadness, and hurt in my life. When I did drugs, it all went away, and it felt liberating. For a long time I didn't realize that I was poisoning myself and my relationships, and slowly it turned less into something I did to help me and more into something I needed to get by. It was destroying my relationships with my friends and my family. I became a very angry, dysfunctional person."

JJ was in the mental health ward of

the hospital over his 15th birthday, where he was being monitored on suicide watch. A week after he returned home, his mother found out he had been smoking. For several weeks, his mother never let him out of her sight for fear of what might happen. She had also begun looking for out-of-home placement options for her son.

"When I came to the Ranch I was still a very angry person, but it wasn't as apparent because I was pretty good at hiding it.... Three months into the Ranch, I publicly confessed I was done with God, I was super angry, I hated God, and I hated everyone there."

JJ's opposition to authority and refusal to participate in the program resulted in repeated consequences. One night, he was serving one of these consequences, completing the community dish chore.

An intern, Rachel, was nearby supervising JJ as he worked. She struck up a conversation with him and began asking him questions about his future. Up until this point, JJ had never really considered his future. "As we talked, I realized I wanted more for myself than doing nothing.... I wanted to have a successful life even though I didn't want to admit it." As JJ shared, Rachel affirmed his desires and that she believed he had what it took to get there. A seed of hope was planted.

However, as Christmas time drew near, JJ continued on a negative path. JJ watched as one of his friends was dismissed from the program and another suspended. He knew if his behavior didn't change he would be next.

Five days into Christmas break, JJ was sitting on the hotel room floor at 3am, reckoning with life back at the Ranch. "I just realized I couldn't do it on my own anymore. I asked God to take me back. I thought things would



get better immediately, but it took a long time."

"All I knew was to pray. Anytime I was walking - from the school to the lodge, to the bathroom - I would ask for a new heart, for peace, for His help."

One day, as JJ was talking to one of the interns - someone he had struggled to get along with - he realized he was filled with love towards this person. "That made me realize I had a heart change." He realized then, too, that he hadn't woken up angry in a few days. "I felt this burden lifted off of me, and I felt like a lot of the pain and sorrow I was carrying had been taken away."

JJ recognized that God had answered his prayers, that He had given him a new heart. In March, JJ had the opportunity to share his testimony with the Ranch family during Spiritual Emphasis Week. He began to experience restoration in relationships, and he began to put forth effort in all areas of Ranch life. *(cont. on back pg)*

JJ, Jacob, and interns Kendall and Angel make up the Beckwourth roadside cheering squad at this year's Agony Ride.



# AGONY RIDE 2024

**\$450,302**

RAISED IN GIFTS & PLEDGES

**25,951**

MILES RIDDEN

**127 / 11**

RIDERS IN PERSON/VIRTUAL

## Ride Stats

### Leaderboard:

Top man: Frank Winters, 357  
Top woman: Maddie Johnston, 308

### Money raised leaderboard:

- 1: Jensen Near (CER staff) - \$39,682
- 2: Nate Boyd (CER staff) - \$35,021
- 3: Tom Blackburn - \$24,913
- 4: Roger Brouwer - \$23,009
- 5: Grace Blackburn - \$21,816
- 6: Jonathan Palmer - \$17,784
- 7: Craig McAtee - \$14,583
- 8: Thomas Cook - \$13,150
- 9: Gary Robinson - \$12,349
- 10: Austin Sather (CER staff) - \$10,872

"At the very end, when I was mentally done, the wind was really bad. I was slowing down to 10 mph. Roger pulled alongside me. He says, 'Hey, you look like you need a little help. Do you mind if I help for a little bit?' And Roger took the front position - he took the full brunt of [the wind] - the entire 6 mile stretch back. Where have I seen that before? Where someone took the entire burden for me? Because of that, I made it to Loyaltan. I got my goal because of the self-sacrifice of others." - Austin Elliot

"I found strength in weakness and a new determination to finish strong for the sake of others." - Tom Brown

"Because of you riders, I have the opportunity to learn and grow at the Ranch. Through the Ranch, the Lord has done some amazing things in my life." - Addy, student

"I never realized I was loved this much in my entire life. I just wanted to say to the riders thank you so much for showing me how truly special I am." - Dillan, student



In its 42nd year, the Agony Ride, our annual 24-hour bike-a-thon, continues to grow. We had a record number of riders on the course this year, with 57 of them being first-time riders. CER staff Nate Boyd and Jensen Near both surpassed the previous individual fundraising record set last year at \$32,258 by Greg Thomas. Fundraising continues to skyrocket, exceeding last year's record high of \$391,881. All money raised goes toward student tuition scholarships.

We want to express our deepest gratitude to each person that showed up this year - and to those who rode virtually from across the country and around the world. Thank you all for making the Agony experience what it is.



"It finally struck me on the last leg: 'God I keep asking you to make it easier. I don't need you to make it easier, I just need you to make it possible.' So many of my prayers are focused on asking God to make things easier. I don't find that promise anywhere in Scripture. But I do see Him saying, 'Through Him all things are possible, and without Him you can do nothing.'" - Jensen Near



"The verse that kept coming to me was, 'While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.' If you ask me for something, I'll probably give it to you, if you need help, I'll help you, if you need to borrow something, I'll loan it to you. But I know you. This was the first time in my life I have gone through so much suffering for a whole lot of people I don't even know. And I just thought about Jesus who died on the cross for us when we didn't deserve it." - Larry Farinha

"Agony is like a family reunion where you feel like you're a part of something that's so amazing. I want that to continue--to go home and build the kingdom with this much energy and passion all the time. But that can feel like too much; like we don't have the strength, or we're not enough. When Jesus starts His ministry, He says He's come to bind up the brokenhearted. All of us have brokenness, but even so, we're still called to build God's kingdom. There's nobody out there that's being a part of God's kingdom from a place of epic strength." - Jonathan Palmer

A big thank you to our corporate sponsors for this year's ride (left). Photos courtesy of Liz Brouwer, Isaiah Gonzalez, Vitaliy Prokopets, and Jim Schuessler.



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*Fall Serve Day*  
Oct. 12, 9am - 1pm

*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.*



## MEMORIALS

*In memory of Alison Arcadi, given by:*  
Cynthia Cole

*In memory of Matt Gilliland, given by:*  
Gene & Robbin Adams

*In memory of Mary Lou (Bundy) Jackson, given by:*  
Gene & Robbin Adams

## HONORARIUMS

*In honor of Alena Egense, given by:*  
Arlis Crews  
Leona Flowers

## Joseph J. *(cont. from pg. 1)*

"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws." (Ezekiel 36:26-27)

At our Year-End Celebration in June, JJ was given the "Light in the World" award, an award given to a student who has broken out of darkness and whose life is a light in the world. The transformation was evident to all.

"The most beautiful thing for me in turning over my life to Christ is the process of sanctification, of just slowly getting better and better. You're going to fall down and you're going to fail, but God is there to help you through it."

JJ reflects on his past year at the Ranch: "The Ranch offered me structure and community - a place where I am given encouragement even when I don't want it. A place where people keep on fighting for you, where people don't give up on you. When you tap into a [Christ-based community], you can grow so much."

JJ is on track to complete high school here in January and continues to seek the Lord for direction for his future - with hope.

*Zoya Lee*