

Brotherhood Born in Ashes



Jeffrey E. Hansen, Ph.D.

DJ came to me in therapy at Holdfast Recovery. That is where our story begins. He didn't come as a friend or a brother or a companion, just as a man who had reached the end of what he could hold on his own.

He was a large man, twice my size. The kind of presence that could fill a room without needing to speak. He had risen through the ranks to become a fire captain. He led others through chaos, through fire, through tragedy. People depended on him. They looked to him for calm in the burning places. He knew what it was to carry lives in his hands.

But strength like that has a cost.

His childhood had left deep wounds, unspoken and unattended. Then came the years of service, years of running toward devastation so others could run away. Years of holding the sorrow of strangers. Years of carrying more loss than most ever encounter. It added up. Layer by layer. Weight upon weight.

And though he led many with steady courage, the cost eventually broke him.

So he came to therapy. He came quietly. He came honestly. He came without trying to appear strong. He came because the soul can only carry so much alone.



We began gently. We talked. We prayed. We sat in silence when silence was more truthful than words. Sometimes we held hands as we prayed together. His hands were large, scarred by work and service, yet they held prayer with such tenderness. And there were moments when tears would come. Not the kind that collapse a man, but the kind that reveal the depth of what he has carried. Tears of a strong man who was no

longer afraid to show his hurt. I always admired that about him. His strength was never loud. It was honest.

Healing came slowly, the way dawn comes, almost unnoticed until light has returned. He let pain rise to the surface and allowed grace to meet it. He softened, not into weakness, but into wholeness.

And then, in time, he did something even rarer.
He returned.

DJ came back to Holdfast Recovery, not as a client, but as a brother among brothers. He co-led groups with me. He sat with men who were where he once had been. And he offered not advice, but presence. Not performance, but truth. The completion of his healing was never just about himself. It showed itself in the way he poured into others. He stayed connected to his brothers long after the formal work ended. He checked on them. Encouraged them.



Walked with them. I have seen professionals with years of training do less, and with less heart.

This was the fruit of his healing.
Not perfection.
Presence.

And then life turned, and my own heart shattered with the passing of my twin brother Gregg.

Grief is a language few can understand. It does not ask for correction or counsel. It asks for presence. Quiet presence.

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DJ did not try to lift my sorrow.
He simply refused to let me carry it alone.

He remembered Gregg.
He asked how my heart was.
He stood near with gentleness rather than answers.

He blessed my soul simply by showing up.

What began in therapy became something more human, more sacred. Two lives that had known breaking, learning how to remain open anyway. A brotherhood, not formed in ease, but born in ashes.

I am grateful for him.
For the courage he showed in his healing.
For the grace he learned to offer others.
And for the kindness he extended to me, quietly and without fanfare.

Thank you, DJ, for trusting me with your story.
Thank you for allowing me into your life.
And thank you for having the courage, the grace, and the kindness to enter mine.

