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The Stories

I do not often write publicly about people I have worked with clinically. There are good reasons for that. The therapeutic relationship is sacred ground, and protecting it matters deeply to me. Yet every once in a while, there are exceptions. Jered is one of them.

I first met Jered nearly a year ago when he came under my care struggling with significant addiction and the emotional and psychological underpinnings driving it. As I listened to him talk about his life, I remember having the same thought over and over again: this sounds too good to be true.

You know the feeling. Someone tells a story so unusual, so layered with adventure and improbability, that part of you quietly assumes there must be exaggeration somewhere in the telling. And frankly, sometimes there is. But there are also those rare individuals whose lives really do unfold with a kind of strange intensity and richness that almost feels cinematic, almost larger than life.

Jered was one of those men.

As I got to know him better, I began researching some of the things he shared with me, and one by one, I discovered they were true. Entirely true. The more I listened, the more I realized that the remarkable quality of his stories was not exaggeration. It was simply the reality of a man who had lived hard, fast, creatively, and at times dangerously.

Jered has lived a remarkable life. He is a union longshoreman by trade, bright, capable, highly competent, and entrusted with operating massive cranes and machinery that most of us can scarcely imagine handling. The kind of work little boys stare at in awe. The kind of work requiring precision, courage, intelligence, and calm under pressure.

Massive steel containers swing over dark water at dawn. Radios crackle. Engines hum. Men work dangerous jobs in weather most people would never willingly stand in. There is something rugged and deeply masculine about that world, something demanding and unforgiving, and Jered learned to function inside it with remarkable competence.

Many young boys growing up would look at someone like Jered and think, I want to do that someday.

That is Jered.

A Life Larger Than Fiction

But the stories did not stop there.

He spoke about blowing glass and moving within circles that included legendary artists like Dale Chihuly and other master glassworkers. He described the mesmerizing heat of the furnaces, the fluid movement of molten glass, and the strange blend of danger and beauty that accompanies that kind of work. It fit him somehow. Jered has always carried both intensity and artistry within him.

There was something almost symbolic about that image when I thought about it later. Molten glass itself is unstable, beautiful, dangerous, and capable of becoming something extraordinary only when guided carefully through intense heat. In some ways, that metaphor fit Jered's own life remarkably well.

He talked about inventing an apparatus with extraordinary promise, only for me later to discover evidence that he had indeed created exactly what he described. He recounted a terrifying experience while riding his bicycle when he was confronted by an unstable landowner and nearly killed, escaping only because he improvised a story about his daughter supposedly riding behind him, causing the man to hesitate long enough for Jered to get away.

Again, the story sounded too extraordinary to believe. And again, I later found the news coverage confirming it had happened exactly as he described.

Too good to be true? Apparently not.

But remarkable stories alone are not what make a remarkable man. Plenty of people live adventurous lives while remaining emotionally lost, internally fragmented, or deeply destructive. The deeper story of Jered is not ultimately about cranes, inventions, danger, or artistic circles. The deeper story is about what happened underneath all of that.

Because underneath the adventure and creativity was also a man carrying tremendous pressure, tremendous internal intensity, and wounds that eventually demanded attention.

The Firefighter Within

Like many highly driven and creative individuals, Jered carried enormous internal intensity. In NeuroFaith® language, much of that intensity operated through what Internal Family Systems would call a firefighter defense system — the part of us that pushes relentlessly, over-functions, overmanages, strives compulsively, and then eventually seeks relief through unhealthy forms of escape when the pressure becomes unbearable.

Men like Jered often learn how to function at extraordinarily high levels while simultaneously carrying profound exhaustion underneath the surface. They become good at solving problems, managing crises, improvising solutions, and pushing through adversity. They become dependable. Highly capable. Sometimes even admired.

But eventually the nervous system begins demanding relief somewhere.

For some, that relief comes through rage. For others, withdrawal, isolation, compulsive behavior, or addiction. The outward presentation may look different from person to person, but underneath it often lies the same exhausted nervous system searching desperately for regulation and relief.

For Jered, addiction became part of that cycle.

Underneath the strength and competence were unresolved wounds, stress, fear, and pain that needed attention. And to his tremendous credit, he faced those realities with unusual honesty and courage. Not superficially. Not performatively. He did the work. He learned healthier ways to regulate emotionally and physiologically. He learned to understand the defensive patterns driving his behavior. He learned how trauma and pressure had shaped the ways he coped with life. He learned how the nervous system can become trapped in cycles of overactivation and

escape. Slowly, the man who had spent so much of his life running hot began learning how to slow down enough to actually listen to his own heart. And perhaps most importantly, he increasingly learned what it means to place God first.

That became the turning point.

Grace That Grounds

As Jered's faith deepened, his life slowly began reorganizing itself around something steadier and more eternal than adrenaline, striving, or escape. Recovery became more than simply abstaining from addiction. It became about discovering purpose, balance, surrender, and meaning.

The creativity did not disappear. Neither did the brilliance, the ambition, or the enormous energy that had always driven him. Those qualities were never the enemy. The difference now is that they are increasingly bridled rather than chaotic, increasingly directed rather than explosive.

What once threatened at times to scatter him now appears more grounded, more measured, and increasingly guided by purpose rather than impulse. There is still fire in him. Still creativity. Still intensity. But the fire no longer seems to own him in the same way.

Too good to be true? Sometimes grace feels that way.

Today, Jered has returned to the world of the longshoremen, an environment that, like many high stress professions, carries significant struggles with addiction, mental health concerns, pressure, and emotional isolation. But he returns differently now. He has increasingly become someone helping address those very struggles, stepping into training and leadership roles aimed at helping others navigate the kinds of battles he once fought himself.

There is something profoundly beautiful about that. The wounded becoming healers. The restless becoming grounded. The man who once needed rescue increasingly becoming a source of stability for others. Those are the kinds of transformations that quietly restore one's faith in humanity. And perhaps even more than that, they remind us that people are capable of far more change than we sometimes dare believe.

Brothers in Christ

Somewhere along the way, carefully and responsibly, our professional relationship evolved into something more enduring. We became brothers in Christ and genuine friends. That can be

delicate territory for therapists, and it must always be approached ethically and thoughtfully, but sometimes life unfolds that way.

And the truth is, Jered teaches me things too.

He reminds me not to become cynical about possibility. He reminds me that creativity is not the enemy. Vision is not the enemy. Ambition is not the enemy. The challenge is learning how to harness those gifts wisely rather than being consumed by them. I would like to think I help encourage him toward grounding, balance, and thoughtful restraint. And he encourages me not to stop imagining what might still be possible.

The future for Jered?

Well, if I am honest, part of me still occasionally shakes its head at some of his stories and thinks: this simply cannot be real.

But I have learned something important over the years.

Sometimes the most extraordinary stories are true.

And sometimes redemption itself can feel a little too good to be true.