

## Rachel — A Faithful Life That Changed Mine

*-Jeffrey E. Hansen, Ph.D.*



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### The Presence that Kept Coming Back

There are moments in life when you realize that everything changed because one person cared enough to keep showing up, and for me that person is Rachel. We were just kids at the same high school, both gymnasts, both intense and driven in our own ways, and yet even then she carried something I did not have language for. There was a steadiness about her that you could feel before you could name it, a kindness that never felt forced, an openness that made being around her feel peaceful and grounded. You always felt better in her presence. Her faith was not something she argued for. It was something she lived. It came from a heart that was settled and a soul that seemed at rest in God, and even as a resistant, argumentative teenager I could not fully dismiss what I experienced when I was near her.

She and her friend Karen would come to our house, and my dad would say, half amused, “The missionaries are here,” and I turned it into verbal combat. I debated. I pushed back. I was not

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kind. I had no interest in faith and every intention of proving her wrong. And yet she kept coming back. Not with arguments but with patience. With gentleness. With a love that never humiliated me for being where I was. She offered connection before I wanted it. She offered peace before I knew I needed it. She stayed present in a way that planted something in me long before I had any framework for understanding it.

Her strength had been shaped in places most people never saw. Her father, in many ways a decent man, could also be hard to be around, and then he died when she was still very young. She became the first person my age I had ever known who had lost a parent, and even then, there was in her, a resilience that was quiet but unmistakable. She remained hopeful. She remained optimistic. She remained faithful. That same courage showed up in the way she lived with joy. For a time, she dated my brother after he had come to faith, and she rode a Honda 400 Four



motorcycle, the only girl in our entire circle of friends who rode. It was fearless and joyful and so completely Rachel, moving toward life rather than shrinking back from it.

### **The Night That Opened My Life**

Then came that night at the church, at the rehearsal for the gospel group she was singing in. They were honestly very good, and when they finished, they sat down together on the floor of the stage and prayed, the singers themselves, with a sincerity that was completely real. There was no performance, no pressure, just a reality I could not explain away, and in that moment, I knew they had something I did not have but deeply wanted.

So that evening I prayed and asked Jesus to come into my life without fully understanding what that would mean, and yet everything began to change. Not all at once, not in ways that were dramatic on the outside, but steadily and deeply. As my faith began to take root, God started revealing the places in my life that were not aligned with the life I now wanted to live with Him. One of those places was a relationship I cared about deeply but that was not honoring to Him, and in obedience, and with real sadness, we chose to go our separate ways. At the time I did not understand that costly obedience is often the clearest testimony. But Joyce watched. She saw that something real had taken hold in me. And later she said words I have never forgotten: “If this faith thing is good enough for Hansen, it’s good enough for me.” And she came to faith in her own genuine and beautiful way, went on to marry a pastor, and became a singer in a

gospel group that traveled around the world, carrying the very hope that had first reached both of us through Rachel's faithful presence.

And then there was the day Rachel said to me, with that gentle knowing smile that always meant she was about to say something both honest and kind, "I have somebody in mind I know you will like. She has all your *specifications*." Wink, wink. It still makes me smile because it was never about a checklist. It was about how well she knew me and how much she cared about the kind of life I would live. And she was right. Leah is grace and depth of faith and depth of character and depth of heart, beautiful on the inside and beautiful on the outside in a way that endures through decades of life and calling and children and joy and suffering. How blessed I was that Rachel loved me enough to want that kind of life for me, that she would pray for me, that she would foster that connection, that she would see something in me I could not yet see in myself.

Apart from Rachel I would not have found Jesus. I would not have found Leah. I would not have had the children who became such profound blessings. I would not have had the spiritual direction that shaped everything I am. All because one person kept showing up.

### **A Life That Endures and a Gratitude That Deepens**

Her own life has been marked by deep pain. The loss of her little boy at about five years old was a sorrow that would have broken many, and not long after that came cancer, a battle she faced with the same quiet courage and faith that have always defined her. She came through it in ways that felt nothing short of miraculous, continuing to love, to give, to encourage, to live for others. Over the years the cost of that suffering, the accumulated weight of grief carried with such grace, and now the frailty of her heart and body have slowly taken their toll. And yet through it all she has remained the same at her core, warm and open and faithful and courageous, always thinking of others, always loving, always believing. There are people whose faith is something they talk about. Rachel's faith is something you feel when you sit next to her. It settles you. It steadies you. It reminds you of who you are and whose you are.

Now we find ourselves in our seventies, aware in a way we once were not that there is less time ahead of us than behind us, and for Rachel that awareness carries a particular tenderness. It is becoming clear that she may reach heaven before the rest of us, and there is a sacredness in that realization that is difficult to put into words. What fills my heart is not sadness so much as gratitude. Gratitude for her life, for her love, for the way she has endured, for the way she has remained faithful in every season. Because I know how this story ends. One day Jesus will take her home and she will hear the words she has been living her whole life, well done, good and faithful servant, and I will see her again, the one who led me to my Savior and the one who led

me to my wife. Even now I want to honor her life with the same tenderness she has given to so many of us.

## **The Meaning I Discovered Decades Later**

Only decades after meeting Rachel did I find language for what I had experienced in her all along. Long before I studied the brain and the heart and trauma and healing, I had already encountered relational connection, a settled presence, a life aligned in faith and love. What I would eventually call NeuroFaith® was first lived out in front of me by Rachel. She created safety before I believed I needed it. She offered connection before I was willing to receive it. She carried a faithful presence that allowed transformation to take root in another human being. Before there was a model there was a relationship. Before there was theory there was a life.

And when I look at my faith, my marriage, my children, my calling, and the work I now do in the world, I know who kept showing up. Before NeuroFaith® had a name it had a face. Her name is Rachel.

And when I think of your life now, Rachel, what comes to me is that lifelong constancy. You were steady when I was restless. You were kind when I was combative. You were faithful when I did not yet know what faith meant. You never forced. You never shamed. You never turned away. You simply kept loving, kept believing, kept showing up, and in doing so you gave me a life that surpassed anything I could have imagined for myself. You gave me direction when I had none. You gave me value when I did not know my own worth. You gave me a way by living the way, embodying the very faith you spoke about with a constancy and a grace that never faltered.

Scripture says that those who lead many to righteousness will shine like the stars forever and ever, and that is your life. And I carry it in mine with unending gratitude until the day we stand in that same light together again.

Thank you, Rachel.

*Jeff, your loving brother in Christ*