

## Salvation for Jeffry

**1**

- by Hank Lajoie

Everyone in Jacob's Cove knew Jeffry Bonds. He appeared unannounced on or around his fiftieth birthday. Unassuming and gentle, he had a quick smile and exuded warmth toward everyone he met. The children especially liked him and for many, he had eased them through trying times and difficult situations.

In the small town, little more than a village, actually ... he accepted whatever menial tasks were available to eke out a living. He was able to rent a small, two-room efficiency and after several months had reached a level of comfort with which he was well pleased.

His good works in the community began when the local hardware store reported some handyman tools missing. Jeffrey had worked several odd jobs with a high school dropout, Roger Cummings. Roger had mentioned to Jeffry that he hoped one day to acquire enough tools to go into business as a handyman. He approached Roger and noticed that he had a brand new tool chest. He didn't need any hints as to what tools it contained.

Jeffry became Roger's counselor and mentor, negotiating a satisfactory settlement with the hardware store's owner. Roger went on with his business effort and within three months, was a well respected handyman, making enough money to enjoy a comfortable lifestyle. Jeffry and Roger became close friends, but Jeffry was just beginning his good works.

He spent many evenings watching boys play basketball and football in a nearby school playground. It was here he noticed certain behaviors that hinted of problems in the lives of several boys. He managed to make friends with many of the boys and thus was able to get closer to the problems the boys faced. Their problems ran the gamut from girls to smoking and Jeffry proved to be worldly enough to give effective guidance.

Even the parents grew to appreciate Jeffry's influence as their children began to conduct themselves more responsibly than before and openly expressed their admiration of Jeffry and happily voiced their affection for him.

Jeffry was taken by surprise when he was contacted by a committee appointed by the school board. Having heard of his positive influence and good works in the community he was offered a position as building supervisor without all the red tape normally a part of a school opening. Had he been properly vetted, further consideration would have been the outcome, if he were to be considered at all.

Jeffry's background check would have revealed a dark past, worlds apart from the good works he was now known for. Of course, anyone looking into it would have to know to look for Jeremy Banks.

# 2

- by Sandra King

Jeffry sat slumped in the back booth of Marie's Diner idly moving from hand to hand the same cup of black coffee he'd been nursing for the past twenty minutes. The question was simple. Should he take the job or not? Sure, Building Supervisor was just a glorified name for custodian, and who pays attention to the custodian of a high school? It sounded safe, but ... one unhappy teacher, one disgruntled parent, or maybe one screwed-up kid, and it would all be over but the shouting. And what about the paperwork? This wasn't a job; it was steady employment. A contract, hospitalization, work history ... just one long paper trail. Nobody questioned a handyman. Contractors? Another story. His philosophy had always been "keep it simple."

The bell over the diner door tinkled, and Jeffry jerked upright, instantly alert. His right hand slid under the table, ready to reach for a weapon no longer there. Old Mr. Jonas shuffled through the door up to the counter where Marie stood, coffee pot in hand. She wasn't looking at the old man, she was looking straight at Jeffry with a quizzical expression on her face. Damn!

"Hey," Jeffry called, "I was just getting ready to ask for a warm-up." He smiled and held up his cup.

Marie smiled back. "Sure, Sugar, be right there soon as I get Mr. Jonas his afternoon pie and coffee."

Double damn! That was a mistake. The job offer was already making him careless. Jeffry glanced at Marie busy at the counter. She was back to normal, laughing at something the old man said. Jeffry relaxed into his previous sprawl, and resumed his attempt to consider every negative outcome if he did take the job.

He looked up at Marie as she sauntered to his table.

"Why so glum?" she asked with a smile. "Hope it's not the coffee." She began to pour fresh coffee into his cup. "Thinkin' about your new job?"

Jeffry stilled and blinked.

"It's a small town," she offered in explanation. "Word is you're good with kids. Liked the way you straightened out Roger Cummings. Kids like you, leastwise the boys. "Girls usually go along with what they say." She added, "Enjoy your coffee," as she moved on to the next booth.

That was when Jeffry realized that not taking the job could also raise questions and start people asking "why?" If he wanted to stay in this town, he would have to take the job.

# 3

- by Jean Teeling

Jeffry emptied his cup of coffee and waved goodbye to Marie, giving her his best smile and then he walked across the street to a small park, He sat on an empty bench deciding how to take the job and be assured that his past would remain in the past. He thought, the school is trying to raise money to build a new gym and send the band to march in the Macy's Christmas Parade. This is really not a good time to be taking on a new employee. I think I know how to take the job and avoid the paperwork and background checks.

Jeffry arrived at the school at 3:30, just as the last school bus was leaving the parking lot. He walked down the empty hall and into the conference room where he had been told the committee would be meeting after school. Henry O'Donald stood and offered his hand to Jeffry. "Jeffry, welcome. We were just discussing your job offer."

Jeffry removed the baseball cap he always wore and sat down in the chair to which Henry pointed. "Before you say anything else, I want you to know that I do want to work at the school." After applause from the committee, he continued. "But I am aware of the two major fund raising projects going on right now. I have even participated in a couple of the fund raising events like the car wash and painting the front of Wilson's grocery. I want to suggest a way that I can do the job but not take any money from the school and save money that I am spending already."

Henry held up his hand. "Jeffry, we would not have offered you the position if we did not have the funds to pay you."

"I appreciate that, Henry, but just hear me out. I noticed a large empty room in the basement when I helped carry some boxes up at Halloween. If you would allow me to live in that room rent free and let me eat my meals in the school cafeteria I would be saving the money I am paying for rent and food. The only other expense I would have is gas for my car if I have to do any errands for the school. I have some money saved up for anything else I need. I would just be a live-in building supervisor. I could check that all the doors are locked and report any suspicious activity, like boys smoking in the bathroom."

"That is a very unusual but generous proposal, Jeffry. Are you sure you would be happy living in the school basement?"

"Yes sir, I am very sure. All I would need is a little furniture for the room. I noticed it already has electricity, heat and air. But, a microwave would be nice."

# 4

- by Winifred Weishampel

After making his needs known, the committee suggested Jeffrey might allow them to discuss all the options and properly consider his offer. They would have a special meeting after school tomorrow to let him know what they decided.

The sun was beginning to set and Jeffrey knew he should eat something, although he was really too involved with all the “what ifs” to enjoy a meal just then. Absent-mindedly heading toward his rooms, he was almost struck by a vehicle careening down Main Street. Screeching tires, fenders scrunching against garbage cans and tires loudly bumping against intersection curbs, culminating in a horrendously loud crash against an old telephone pole, left Jeffrey in a state of shock as he tried to collect himself.

“Well,” he thought. “Not the first time.”

For the few moments he had to feel anything at all, the police arrived on the scene. Anxiety of a past brush with death flooded in, rendering him incapable of any movement at all.

“Jeffry! Jeffry! Man, are you okay?” said an excited voice.

“Wha -- what? Oh, sure, yeah, I’m okay. The driver? Is he okay? Were there any passengers?”

“Whoa, man! Take it easy. I have no idea, but we can walk over to find out. I just saw you standing there, stiff and all, I thought maybe you’d been hurt somehow.”

Jeffrey immediately softened his stature, hearing the kind words from none other than Roger Cummings, the boy he had helped.

“No,” said Jeffrey, “I’m sorry I alarmed you. It -- it’s just that it caught me by surprise, that’s all. Guess I was in shock. Sorry.”

“Aw, that’s okay. There’s the sheriff. Hey Sheriff! What’s the scoop?”

“Dunno much,” the sheriff responded. “Waiting for the coroner. Poor guy didn’t make it.”

Jeffrey shrunk back into the crowd that had formed and wished he was already living in the secluded basement of the school. There was so much confusion from the crowd that had been drawn to the incident that he was able to leave the scene, virtually unnoticed. During the walk home, his thoughts of “what ifs” bounced around in his brain, mixing with the reality of the crash. The next morning, after a fitful sleep, he dragged himself out of bed when the alarm sounded the next morning. Instead of his usual relaxed, methodical routine, he had a difficult time functioning.

The day seemed to drag on forever. Everyone was buzzing about the dead guy in the accident. It took all he had to reassure the few who asked if he was alright, but finally, the school day ended and it was time to hear the board's verdict. Would he be able to maintain his anonymity as custodian by "hiding" in the school basement?

As soon as Jeffry entered the meeting room, he knew that they approved his idea. Every face was shining happily and looking straight at him. For just a second, Jeffry felt weak in the knees, so he deftly slid into the nearest desk, with eyes wide open and a look of great anticipation as he heard Henry say, "Jeffry Bonds. We are proud to announce that we have unanimously voted to accept your generous offer. And, before you ask, yes, there will be a microwave."

# 5

- by Jeff Brooke-Stewart

The coffee at Marie's Diner was not the best that Jeffry had tasted, but it did provide a healthy dose of caffeine, and that morning Jeffry needed a boost. Cradling his mug and gazing out of the window, he thought about his situation and wondered why he felt just a little nervous.

Things were going well at the school. The basement was comfortable enough and the work was pretty light, even if it was incredibly boring. The faculty and students were all very friendly. Still, the feeling of nervousness hung over him.

It was not a new feeling. In fact, this mood had come to him two or three times over the past five years. They had come each time that his life seemed to be straightening itself out. Those times when it seemed too good to be true. And on each of those occasions something had gone wrong and he had found the need to quickly move on to some other place. To become some other man.

"Cheer up Jeffry, my coffee can't be all that bad considering the amount you drink! You look like somebody just walked over your grave or something. Here, let me fill your mug. Oh, and look here. Looks like you have company. Good morning, sheriff."

The sheriff sat opposite Jeffry without waiting for an invitation. The sheriff looked smug. Jeffry felt uneasy, and he hoped that it did not show.

"Well now Jeffry. We need to have a little unofficial chat. Seems like there was nothing physically wrong with the gentleman who was killed in the car crash last week. That made his family very curious. So they got hold of old Tom Richards, the town lawyer, and just asked him to kind of poke around a little. Tom is a good man, and not one of them city ambulance chasers. So he talked to a couple of people and found a man who was the only real witness to the crash, and all he could recall was you. He said that you were aimlessly walking across the sidewalk just before it happened. After the crash, he said that you were standing as stiff as a post right on the edge of the road. I also remember seeing you like that. Well, don't you know but the question came to Tom's mind as to whether you, Jeffry, might have caused that crash?" He paused.

"Anyway, in the end Tom could see nothing in any of that, but he decided that the least he could do for the family was to take a look at your background. A quick internet search. You know that kind of thing. Hell, Jeffry, he could not find anything, only some local references to you helping Roger Cummings, and you know how I feel about that. Stealing is stealing and the man should have been punished. So Tom came to me. He asked me to look in our data bases because they are pretty extensive. Would you like another refill, you look awfully nervous, Jeffry."

The sheriff leaned back and took a deep mouthful of coffee.

“Now here comes the strange thing Jeffry. You do not exist! You just are not. There is no Jeffry Bonds. Oh, I found a couple of guys by that name, but they most definitely are not you. So now, why don’t you tell me what’s going on.”

Jeffry was now in control of his feelings. He was cool. He had been through this before and he knew what he was going to have to do now. He finished his coffee, put down a couple of bucks for Marie, and stood up.

“Well, sheriff, that makes no sense. I guess you had better go back to your data base. Me? I have some school rooms to clean.” Jeffry walked out of the diner.

The sheriff sat quietly for a few minutes before picking up one of the dollar bills and carefully wrapping it in a clean handkerchief. He could not do anything official, but he was pretty sure that he would be able to lift a good print from the dollar bill.

# 6

- by Hank Lajoie

The sheriff grew impatient after two weeks had passed with no response to his request for a fingerprint ID on Jeffry. He felt it was time to call an old friend, an FBI contact with whom he had worked several years ago.

Agent Mark Warren answered the caller with, "Sheriff Lou Terry? Hell, you were just a fresh, new deputy last time we talked. How've you been?"

"Been okay," the sheriff replied. "A little older, wiser and fatter. How about you?"

"Riding a desk now, coasting to retirement. What can I do for you?"

"I sent a print up to you folks a couple of weeks ago and I'm trying to find out if you got a hit on it. Can you check on it or refer me to the right folks to get a response?"

"I'll look into it for you, but I can't figure why it has taken this long. Is it connected to a major felony?"

"No, I don't think so, unless something comes up with the ID," the sheriff said.

"Give me a day or two. I'll see what I can find out for you."

After thanking the agent, Sheriff Terry walked over to the diner for coffee and noticed that Jeffry was sitting at his usual spot. He settled across from him and greeted him.

"Hey, Jeffry. How's everything?"

"Just fine, sheriff. You and Tom finish with your accident probe?"

"Probe? Why would you call it that. It was just a normal investigation. Nothing special."

Jeffry smiled saying, "it just sounded like I was a person of interest for some reason."

"Naw," the sheriff smiled in return. "It was just that we drew a blank on Jeffrey Bonds and that made us curious."

"Don't know what to tell you," Jeffry said with a chuckle. "But I know your frustration. I Googled myself and came up empty, too. I guess this modern technology isn't all it's cracked up to be."

"Guess not."

Drinking their coffee and making small talk, they spent twenty minutes then parted.

Later, Jeffrey entered his room in the school basement. He stopped suddenly as he heard a slight beeping sound coming from his suitcase.

“Damn,” he muttered. “What now?”

He pulled out a secured cell phone from his suitcase and punched in a number. There was a click at the other end and a voice said, “Jeffrey?”

“Yup. What’s going down? I’m supposed to be out of circulation except for national emergency stuff.”

“Nothing like that,” Jeffrey’s handler said. “Looks like someone in the FBI is trying to verify a fingerprint sent in by a Sheriff Terry. They got basic ID stuff like your name and service but no details. Beyond that they ran into our stone wall.”

“Even basic ID is too much. I don’t like being anyone’s hero with all the hullabaloo that goes with it. You know how I feel about it.”

“You should be proud of what you did ... it’s hard to measure.”

“I don’t want to hear that crap. I murdered 18 people, no matter how noble the agency thought that was.”

“Look, you were a special forces sniper and a damned good one. That’s why the agency recruited you and those last four you shot were some pretty mean dudes. You saved more lives than you took, including innocent women and children. You can’t blame people for wanting to thank you and celebrate your retirement.”

“I still have nightmares and I don’t want any part of that past. Just take a big eraser and wipe out Jeffrey Bonds. I thought we had done that.”

“Well, that sheriff is going to know you are Jeremy Banks soon and that you were in special forces. If he asks for anything else, he’s going to get our “access denied” window. Being a sheriff, I’ll bet he won’t be satisfied with that.”

“Probably not. Dammit!” He let out a long sigh. “What’s the next name on the list?”

“Just a sec ... John Blanchard.”

“Another identity to memorize. Get the papers done up and send them to the Seattle Post Office. I’m going to try Alaska this time. I hear tell they don’t worry about who you are up there.”

“Do you know where yet?”

“No, but I’ll find a little out of the way place. I just want to be left alone and I don’t want to bring any of my past with me.”

“Give us a few days and I’ll get a package ready for you. It’s the least we can do for you. After all, we were all part of a top notch team.”

“Don’t remind me. I’m leaving tonight, taking my time. I have enough cash to get me there, but don’t forget the credit card for Mr. Blanchard.”

“You’ve got it, buddy. Travel safely.”

The following morning, Sheriff Terry walked into the diner for his mid-morning coffee.

“Hey, sheriff. Have you seen Jeffry this morning?”

“No, I haven’t, Why?”

“School office called asking if he was here.”

“They say anything else?”

“No, but they said something like he was missing. Why would they say that?”

“Don’t know. It’s probably nothing. I’ll have my coffee, then go on over there.”

“Sure hope nothing’s wrong,” Marie said.

“Why would anything be wrong? He probably just had some personal stuff to take care of. Don’t worry, I’ll check on him.”

Halfway through his coffee. Marie answered a phone call and called to the sheriff, “It’s for you, sheriff. It’s the school.”

“Sheriff Terry,” he said into the phone.

“Henry O’Donald here, sheriff. Have you seen any sign of Jeffry this morning?”

“No, and you’re not the first person to ask.”

“Could you come over here?” Henry asked.

“What’s going on, Henry?”

“All his belongings are gone from his room ... not a trace of him.”

“I’ll be right there,” Sheriff Terry said. He looked at the phone as he disconnected and muttered, “What the hell is going on with Jeffrey?”

As he entered his patrol car, his radio squealed to life. “Sheriff, your FBI friend is on the phone,” the dispatcher said.

“Patch him through.”

“Sheriff, you’re probably not going to like this, but we’ve struck out on that print ID you wanted.”

“Struck out? What the hell does that mean?”

“Except for a different name and service in special forces, we draw a blank on everything else. We ran into the old ‘access denied’ window. When I tried to check that out, I was told it was above my pay grade. Then they told me to tell you to let it go. There’s nothing there we need to know.”

Sheriff Terry navigated the streets toward the school and responded, “Witness protection maybe?”

“No access means no access, sheriff. Let it go.”

Sheriff Terry was frustrated and a touch angry as he pulled into the school parking lot. He noticed that Henry O’Donald was waiting for him at the main entrance. He parked in front of the entrance and exited the car. As he approached Henry, he said, “This day is not getting off on a high note, Henry. What seems to be the problem here?”

“Well, it’s Jeffrey, sheriff. Seems like he just vanished. Follow me.”

They went down to the basement where Jeffrey’s room was located. Except for an empty cot with folded bedding at the foot and an unplugged microwave oven, there was no sign that anyone was living there.

“Don’t know what to tell you, Henry, but all I can do is put out a call and see if anyone’s seen him or his car. I’ll get back to you.”

Two days later, Jeremy walked into the Seattle post office and asked if there was a package for John Blanchard. He accepted and signed for it and left the building. The following day, Mister John Blanchard deplaned in Anchorage, Alaska. Walking toward the center of town, he noticed a billboard promoting The Salvation Army.

“Hmmm,” Blanchard thought. “Why not?”

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