

THE SEVEN STONES

A Stone Brotherhood Tradition



Mike Manzo

First Keeper of the Seven

Established 2026

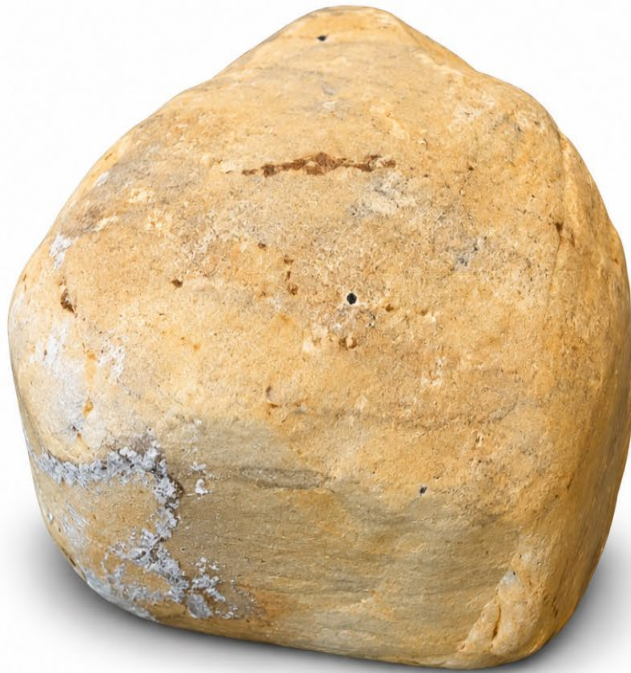
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STONE I

GENESIS STONE

The First Stone



Origin: Delaware Property

Acquired: The First Stone Found at the New Home

THE STORY OF THE GENESIS STONE

The Stone of Beginning

Long before there were seven stones, there was one. It was not purchased for training, and it was not selected because of its weight, shape, or difficulty. No one went searching for it. It was already there.

Our story with the stone began when Rachel and I arrived in Lewes, Delaware, looking for a place to build our new home. We drove into a development that was still taking shape. Some homes were already completed; others were under construction and scattered among them were empty lots waiting for something to begin. We drove through the neighborhood looking at those lots, trying to decide which one felt right to us. Eventually, we chose Lot 150.

At that point, there was not much to see. There was no house. It was simply land—dirt, disturbed earth, and leftover material from the construction of the neighboring home. But we could see something that was not there yet. We could see our home.

Over the months that followed, we returned to Delaware periodically to watch the house being built. Each visit brought another change. What had begun as an empty piece of ground slowly started becoming the place where we would live. Then, during one of those visits, as we pulled up to the property, I noticed something on the front portion of the lot.

A stone.

Coming from upstate New York, seeing stones on someone's property was certainly nothing unusual to me. Stone walls, stone driveways, large natural rocks, and stones incorporated into landscaping are everywhere. But here, something was different. I had not noticed stones like this sitting on the surrounding properties. Yet there it was.

I did not know where it had come from. Perhaps it had been buried beneath the ground and uncovered during excavation. Perhaps it had been moved during construction. Perhaps it had been lying somewhere on that land far longer than any of us could know. I simply noticed it.

Every time we returned to see the progress of the house, I noticed something else: the stone was still there. Construction continued around it. Workers came and went. Earth was moved. The house took shape. Yet the stone remained.

Approximately seven months after choosing that empty lot, the time finally came for our closing and final walkthrough. When we arrived, the transformation was remarkable. The piles of dirt were gone. The property had been graded. The sod had been laid. The landscaping was finished, and the planting beds were neat and complete.

And there, incorporated into one of the landscaped beds in front of our new home, was the stone.

Someone had decided to leave it.

During all the cleanup, grading, and landscaping, it could easily have been hauled away, buried, pushed aside, or discarded. But it was not. It had found a place beside our new home.

At the time, I could not possibly have known what that would eventually mean. There was no Stone Brotherhood. There was no collection. There was no Genesis, Hudson, Plattekill, Dunmore, Glenmore, Highland, or Bravo. There was simply our new home and a stone.

But I remember feeling that there was something meaningful about it. This stone belonged on this property.

As my journey into traditional stone lifting grew, I began looking at that stone differently. Something that had simply been part of the landscape became something to be lifted. And something that was lifted eventually became the beginning of something much larger.

That is when another thought began to intrigue me. How old was this stone? Not how long had it been in the landscaped bed, but how long had it existed? How long had it rested in or beneath that ground before our house was ever imagined? Who had touched it before me? How many people had walked past it? How many workers had moved it during construction? How many hands had been placed upon it without anyone ever stopping to wonder where it came from or where it might someday go?

I will never know those answers, and perhaps I am not supposed to. Eventually, the stone's unknown past became connected to a history that I could know.

Our history.

It was there when our new home was being created. It remained while the land around it was transformed. And later, it would become the first stone in a tradition I never could have imagined when I initially saw it lying in the dirt.

For that reason, there could be only one name: The Genesis Stone.

Genesis means origin, creation, and beginning, and this stone represents all three. It was there at the beginning of our new home. It was there at the beginning of my collection. And it became the beginning of the Seven.

The Genesis Stone is not the heaviest stone in the collection, and it is not the most difficult. Its importance cannot be measured on a scale. Its importance is that it came first.

Every person who someday attempts the Seven will begin where the tradition itself began—with Genesis. And perhaps that is its lesson. Strength rarely announces where a journey will lead. A seemingly insignificant beginning can become the foundation of something that lasts for generations. The first stone does not ask whether you are capable of lifting the last. It asks only whether you are willing to begin.

THE TRADITION OF GENESIS

The Genesis Stone shall always remain the first stone of the Seven. Those who come after me should know its story before placing their hands upon it, not because knowing its history will make the stone any easier to lift, but because within the Seven, the tradition is as important as the weight.

Someday other hands may wrap around Genesis. Perhaps my son's. Perhaps my grandchildren's. Perhaps a member of the Stone Brotherhood. Perhaps someone whose name I could never know.

When that happens, I hope someone tells them about an empty lot in Delaware called Lot 150, about a house that did not yet exist, and about a stone lying in the

dirt. I hope they are told how, while everything around it changed, somehow that stone remained.

Because every journey begins somewhere.

This one began here.

Begin. Build. Endure. Pass it on.

The stone was here before me, and if it is cared for, it will be here long after me.
These stones were never meant to belong to one man.

I was simply their first keeper.



STONE II
HUDSON STONE
Strength in Place



Origin: New York Property
Acquired: A Stone from Home

THE STORY OF THE HUDSON STONE

The Stone of Roots

The Hudson Stone began its story differently from Genesis. Genesis was already visible when I first noticed it. Hudson was buried.

It came from my property in Plattekill, New York, in the Hudson Valley—a place where stones are simply part of the land. Anyone who has spent time digging in that region knows how quickly they begin to appear. Turn the soil, dig a little deeper, and stones that may have been hidden for years begin working their way back toward the surface.

One day in 2020, Rachel and I were working along the driveway, preparing a small planting area for flowers and plants. As we began digging out the soil, stones kept appearing. Most were ordinary enough. I pulled them out, moved them aside, and continued digging.

Then I hit one that was different.

It was harder to remove, and the more dirt I cleared from around it, the more I realized this was not just another small stone in the ground. When I finally worked it free, its shape and size immediately caught my attention.

I looked at it differently.

I wanted to lift it.

So instead of tossing it aside with the others, I kept it. I cleaned it off and eventually carried it inside, where my gym was located at the time. That was the beginning of my relationship with the stone.

I lifted it on and off for years. There was no formal collection then. It did not have a name. It was not part of a seven-stone progression or a tradition intended to be passed down. It was simply a natural stone from my property that I enjoyed lifting.

But sometimes the meaning of something is not obvious when it first enters our lives. It develops over time.

Years later, after discovering what would become the Genesis Stone in Delaware and as my journey into traditional stone lifting continued to grow, I began thinking again about this New York stone. I knew I wanted to bring it with me.

The stone had come out of the ground in Plattekill. It had been lifted in my New York gym. Now it would travel south and take its place among the stones in Delaware.

That journey became part of its identity.

For that reason, it became known as The Hudson Stone.

The name honors the Hudson Valley—the land where it was found and the place where this part of my stone-lifting journey began.

Like Genesis, Hudson also carries an older mystery. I know when I uncovered it, but I do not know how long it had been there. The neighborhood itself had once been mostly undeveloped ground before homes began going up in the area decades earlier. Was the stone always buried beneath that soil? Had it been moved when the land was developed? Had someone else handled it before me and pushed it back into the earth? Or had nature placed it there long before any house, road, or driveway existed?

I will never know.

What I do know is that one day Rachel and I dug into the ground and uncovered it, and from that moment forward, the stone had a new path.

That is what makes Hudson different from Genesis. Genesis remained. Hudson traveled. Genesis became part of a new home. Hudson carried part of the old home with it.

There is something deeply meaningful in that.

We all move through different places and different chapters of our lives. Homes change. Years pass. People come and go. Yet we carry pieces of our past forward with us—memories, lessons, experiences, and the places that helped shape us.

The Hudson Stone represents that connection. It reminds me that moving forward does not require forgetting where you came from. Sometimes the things worth keeping are the things you choose to carry with you.

THE TRADITION OF HUDSON

The Hudson Stone shall remain the second stone of the Seven. Genesis represents Beginning. Hudson represents Roots.

To lift Hudson is to follow the journey of a stone that came from one home and found a place in another. Its lesson is simple: remember where you came from.

Your roots do not hold you back. They give you something to stand upon. And as life changes, there will be things worth leaving behind and things worth carrying forward.

The Hudson Stone was one of those things.

Years from now, someone may place their hands upon it without ever having seen the property in Plattekill where it was buried. They may never know the planting area where Rachel and I uncovered it. They may never see the room where I first brought it inside and began lifting it.

But if its story continues to be told, they will know where it came from.

And that matters.

Because a stone can move from one place to another without losing its origin.

Perhaps people can too.

Genesis begins the journey. Hudson reminds us what we carry with us. Together, they begin the story of the Seven.



STONE III
PLATTEKILL STONE
The Foundation Stone



Origin: New York Property
Acquired: A Stone from Home

THE STORY OF THE PLATTEKILL STONE

The Stone of Foundation

Some stones are uncovered, some are discovered almost by accident, and some seem to be waiting at the edge of things. The Plattekill Stone was one of those.

I found it along the side of our property in Plattekill, New York, at the woodland edge—the place where the maintained lawn ended and the woods began. Unlike the Hudson Stone, it was not buried. It was simply there, sitting at the boundary between our property and the woods with an unusual shape that immediately caught my attention.

I walked over and tried to roll it. That was when I realized this stone was different. It was heavy—noticeably heavier than the Hudson Stone—and its shape told me almost immediately that lifting it would present an entirely different problem.

I wanted it.

There was only one issue. The stone was a long way from the back door and the gym area of the house. This was not something I could simply pick up and carry across the lawn, so I brought out a dolly. I worked the stone onto it and began making my way across the property, dragging this awkward piece of the woodland edge over the grass toward the house.

Eventually, I got it inside. I cleaned away the dirt, and then the real work began.

I had to learn the stone.

The Plattekill Stone was shaped differently from Hudson and, as I would discover years later, completely differently from Genesis. There was no instruction manual, no markings showing me where my hands belonged, and no perfectly balanced center. The stone was not going to change for me. I had to change for the stone.

So, I began experimenting. I tried to figure out where my hands should go, how my fingers should be positioned, where the balance was, and at what angle the stone wanted to leave the floor. Some attempts felt completely wrong. Others taught me something. Little by little, I began learning how to read it.

That became one of my earliest lessons in what natural stone lifting really is. You do not simply lift a stone. First, you have to listen to what the stone is telling you.

There were times when I would go into the gym and simply sit there with Hudson and Plattekill in front of me. Two stones, two completely different shapes, and two pieces of the land outside my home that had somehow found their way into my gym.

Sometimes I would wonder about them. Where had they really come from? How long had they been there? The Plattekill Stone had been resting near the woods, but had it always been in that exact spot? Had it been untouched for decades? Had somebody moved it while the property was being developed? Had a landscaping crew pushed it toward the woods? Had a machine placed it there? Had another person ever tried to pick it up? Or had countless people passed it without ever giving it a second thought?

There was no way to know. The stone could not tell me what happened before I found it.

But from the moment I rolled it and felt its weight, I knew what I wanted its future to be.

I wanted to conquer it.

Over time, something else became certain. When the day came for my stones to make the journey south, this one was coming with me. There was never any question.

The stone that had once rested at the edge of the woods in New York would eventually take its place among the Seven in Delaware, carrying the name of the land from which I knew it.

The Plattekill Stone.

THE TRADITION OF PLATTEKILL

The Plattekill Stone shall remain the third stone of the Seven. Genesis represents Beginning. Hudson represents Roots. Plattekill represents Foundation.

But foundation does not simply mean the ground beneath our feet. A foundation is also everything we learn before we are ready for what comes next.

Plattekill taught me that natural stones cannot always be approached in the same way. The grip that works on one may fail completely on another. The position that feels natural on one may be useless on the next. You have to observe, experiment, fail, adjust, and eventually begin to understand.

That lesson would become increasingly important as the stones became heavier and more difficult.

Years from now, another lifter may stand over the Plattekill Stone and immediately try to overpower it. Perhaps they will struggle. Perhaps they will reposition their hands, walk around it, turn it, study it, and try again. Eventually, they may discover the same lesson I did: the stone does not have to adapt to you. You have to learn the stone.

If they know its story, perhaps they will also picture where it began—not in a gym and not on a lifting platform, but at the edge of a New York property where the grass ended and the woods began.

A stone waiting quietly between two worlds.

Then one day, someone tried to roll it, and its next journey began. It crossed the lawn. It entered the gym. It taught me how to read a natural stone. Eventually, it traveled south to Delaware.

The stone itself may never reveal where it was before I found it, but I know where it has been since.

And now, so will those who come after me.

Genesis taught me to begin. Hudson reminded me where I came from. Plattekill taught me to learn from what stood in front of me.

Three stones. Three beginnings.

And four greater challenges were still waiting ahead.



STONE IV
DUNMORE STONE
The Journey Stone



Origin: Rock Pit Acquisition
Weight: 185 Pounds

THE STORY OF THE DUNMORE STONE

The Stone of Resolve

Sometimes you go looking for a stone, and sometimes you find the place where the stones seem to be waiting for you.

My discovery of the Dunmore Stone began on an ordinary drive to the supermarket. I was still becoming familiar with the area in Delaware, so I was following the GPS along John J. Williams Highway. The road was unfamiliar, the surroundings were unfamiliar, and I was not searching for stones that day. I was simply going to the store.

About five miles into the drive, I happened to look to my right and saw a large sign that read “Rock Pile.” I could not believe what I was seeing, so I immediately pulled in. What I found looked less like a landscaping supply yard and more like a graveyard of stones. There were boulders, river stones, landscaping stone, sand, mulch, and enormous piles of natural rock in every imaginable shape and size. To most people it probably looked like exactly what it was—a place to buy landscaping material. To me, it felt like I had hit the lottery.

I spoke with the owner and explained what I was looking for. He told me I could walk around, choose whatever stones I wanted, and they would weigh them because the stones were sold by the pound. That was all I needed to hear. For the next several hours, I wandered through the piles, rolling stones, moving them, studying their shapes, and placing my hands on them. Even searching through the piles became a workout.

There were thousands of possibilities around me, but I was not interested in simply finding a stone that looked impressive. I was looking for one that felt right. I began placing my hands on different stones and paying attention to the connection I felt with each one. It is difficult to explain to someone who has never experienced that relationship with a natural stone. I was not expecting the stone to literally speak to me, but I was listening to its shape, its surface, the way my hands settled against it, the resistance when I tried to move it, and something harder to describe—a feeling, almost a vibration, that told me whether I wanted to continue working with that particular stone.

I was not searching for something easy. In fact, I wanted the opposite. I wanted a stone that I could not lift. I wanted something heavy enough to force me to become stronger, something that would make me earn the lift rather than simply give it to me.

Eventually, among all those piles, I found several possibilities. One of the employees came over with the equipment and began weighing the stones individually. The first one came in at 185

pounds. I looked at the stone and immediately knew I wanted it. I said, "I'll take it." That stone would eventually become known as the Dunmore Stone.

Another stone selected that same day weighed exactly 200 pounds. I took that one as well. Its story would later become intertwined with the Seven in its own way. With the help of the employees, both stones were loaded into my vehicle. I had arrived on John J. Williams Highway intending to buy groceries, and I was going home with hundreds of pounds of natural stone.

Bringing the Dunmore Stone home did not mean I understood it. For the next couple of days, I spent time with both new stones, touching them, turning them, studying them, and trying different positions. Their shapes were unlike Genesis, Hudson, and Plattekill. Once again, I had to learn the stone. I had to figure out where my hands belonged, which side should face me, where the balance was, and how the stone wanted to come off the ground.

This was becoming one of the things I loved most about traditional stone lifting. A barbell is manufactured to be lifted. A natural stone is not. It owes the lifter nothing. It existed before I arrived, and it did not care whether its shape was convenient for my hands, whether my technique was perfect, or whether I had enough strength to lift it. The responsibility was mine to establish the relationship, read the stone, respect it, and eventually earn the right to move it.

That day at the Rock Pile was when I began to understand that my collection was becoming something more than a few stones I happened to lift. For the first time, I was choosing the stones that would become part of the journey. Among thousands of rocks, some would be left exactly where I found them. A few would come home with me. Eventually, only seven would carry the names, and Dunmore was one of them.

The 185-pound stone received the name Dunmore because the name carries the old meaning of a "great fort" or "great fortress." That meaning fit the stone. A fort stands its ground. It withstands pressure. It is built to endure. Dunmore represented the point in my journey when the challenge became something I deliberately sought rather than something I happened to discover.

Genesis appeared. Hudson was uncovered. Plattekill was found along the woodland edge. Dunmore was chosen.

That difference matters because there comes a point in life when we stop waiting for challenges to find us. We begin searching for the challenges that will make us stronger.

THE TRADITION OF DUNMORE

The Dunmore Stone shall remain the fourth stone of the Seven. It weighs 185 pounds, but its place within the collection is not determined by the number alone. Dunmore represents resolve—the willingness to deliberately place something difficult in front of yourself and say, “I cannot do this yet.”

That final word matters.

Yet.

A challenge beyond today’s ability can become tomorrow’s achievement. The lesson of Dunmore is not that every obstacle can be conquered immediately. It is that some obstacles are worth choosing precisely because they cannot.

Find the challenge. Stand before it. Learn it. Build yourself against it. Return to it. Then discover whether the person who once could not move the stone has become someone who can.

Years from now, another lifter may hear the story of the Dunmore Stone and picture that day on John J. Williams Highway: an unfamiliar road, a glance to the right, a sign that said, “Rock Pile,” thousands of stones, and one man walking among them, placing his hands on stone after stone, searching for something he could not yet lift.

Somewhere among those piles, Dunmore was waiting.



STONE V
GLENMORE STONE
The Former Beast



Origin: Upstate New York Property
Acquired: A Stone from the Land

THE STORY OF THE GLENMORE STONE

The Stone of Adversity

Some stones are found lying in plain sight, some are chosen deliberately, and some remain hidden beneath the earth until the day they are uncovered. The Glenmore Stone was one of those.

I found it in 2018 on our property in Plattekill, New York. We were moving rocks from one side of the property when I came across a stone partially buried in the ground. At first, I did not realize how large it actually was. Most of it was still hidden beneath the soil.

So, I began digging.

The more dirt I removed, the more stone appeared. I worked around its edges, clearing away the earth and trying to understand exactly what I had found. What had first looked like another stone buried on the property continued deeper and wider than I expected.

Eventually, I worked it free.

That was when I saw the whole thing.

It was a beast.

The size, the weight, and especially the awkward shape immediately told me that this was going to be different from the other rocks we had been moving. I did not know exactly how much it weighed, but I knew one thing immediately.

I wanted it.

There was only one problem. I had to get it across the property and into my gym. This was not a stone I could simply pick up and carry, so I found a blanket. I worked the stone onto it and began dragging it across the property.

Little by little, I pulled it toward the gym.

Eventually, I got it inside. I cleaned away the remaining dirt, stood back, looked at this awkward stone I had just pulled from the ground, and gave it the only name that seemed appropriate at the time.

The Beast.

Then the real work began.

I had to learn the stone.

The Beast was difficult for reasons that went beyond its weight. Its awkward size and shape made finding the correct lifting position a challenge. There was no obvious place for my hands,

no perfectly balanced center, and no guarantee that the position that felt strongest would actually make the stone move.

So, I began experimenting. I changed my hand position. I tried different angles. I adjusted where my fingers were placed and how I positioned my body over the stone. There were times when I felt strong enough to lift it, yet the stone refused to cooperate.

That became one of the most important lessons the Beast would teach me. Strength alone was not always enough. Sometimes the problem was not how hard I was pulling. The problem was how I was approaching the stone.

I had to listen to what it was telling me.

Eventually, I began to understand it. A change in hand position could completely alter the lift. A small adjustment in my body could make a stone that had seemed almost impossible suddenly begin to move. The Beast forced me to stop thinking only about strength and start thinking about technique, patience, position, and leverage.

It became an adversary, but it also became a teacher.

Sometimes I would look at it sitting in the gym and think about where it had come from. The property had been developed in 1985, but that told me nothing about the true age of the stone. It had obviously existed long before the house, the driveway, or the property as I knew it.

How long had it been underground? Had it been there for decades? Centuries? Had it always rested in that exact place? Had machinery moved it during construction in 1985 and covered it with soil? Had someone encountered it before me and simply decided it was easier to bury than to move?

There was no way to know.

The stone could not tell me what happened before I found it.

I only knew that in 2018, while moving rocks on my property in Plattekill, I began digging around something that looked much smaller than it actually was. I uncovered it, pulled it from the earth, rolled it onto a blanket, and dragged it across the property into my gym.

From that day forward, its history would no longer be completely unknown.

For years, it remained the Beast. The name fit the challenge it presented to me, but as the Seven Stones began to take shape, I wanted it to carry a name that belonged beside Genesis, Hudson, Plattekill, Dunmore, Highland, and Bravo.

The old nickname described what the stone felt like.

The new name would become part of what the stone represented.

The Glenmore Stone.

THE TRADITION OF GLENMORE

The Glenmore Stone shall remain the fifth stone of the Seven. Genesis represents Beginning. Hudson represents Roots. Plattekill represents Foundation. Dunmore represents Resolve. Glenmore represents Adversity.

But adversity does not simply mean something difficult standing in our way. Sometimes adversity reveals that the way we have always done something is no longer enough.

Glenmore taught me that lesson.

There were times when I approached the stone believing strength should be enough to move it. When it did not move, I could have simply pulled harder and continued fighting against it. Instead, I had to experiment. I had to change my hands, change my position, study the shape, and understand why one attempt failed while another brought the stone from the ground.

The obstacle did not change.

I had to.

That lesson would become increasingly important as the stones became heavier and the challenges greater. Natural stone lifting does not guarantee that yesterday's technique will solve today's problem. Every stone presents something different, and sometimes progress begins only after we are willing to change our approach.

Years from now, another lifter may stand over the Glenmore Stone and immediately understand why I once called it the Beast. They may struggle to find a comfortable grip. They may place their hands in one position, pull, and get nowhere. Perhaps they will move their hands, change their angle, study the stone, and try again.

Eventually, they may discover the same lesson I did.

Adversity is not always telling you to stop. Sometimes it is telling you to change.

If they know its story, perhaps they will also picture where it began—not as Glenmore and not as one of the Seven but partially buried beneath the ground on a property in Plattekill, New York.

A stone revealing itself one shovel of earth at a time.

Then one day, someone finally uncovered all of it and realized just how large and awkward it really was. The stone was worked free, rolled onto a blanket, dragged across the property, and brought into a gym.

There it became the Beast.

Years later, it became Glenmore.

The stone itself may never reveal how many years it spent beneath that ground before I found it, but I know what it has taught me since.

And now, so will those who come after me.

Genesis taught me to begin. Hudson reminded me where I came from. Plattekill taught me to learn from what stood in front of me. Dunmore taught me to deliberately choose a challenge. Glenmore taught me that when adversity stands in front of me, sometimes I must change before expecting the obstacle to move.

Five stones. Five lessons.

And two greater challenges were still waiting ahead.



STONE VI

HIGHLAND STONE

The 200 Pound Stone



Origin: Rock Pit Acquisition

Weight: 200 Pounds

THE STORY OF THE HIGHLAND STONE

The 200 Pound Stone

By the time the Dunmore Stone had been weighed at 185 pounds and I said, "I'll take it," something inside me should have been satisfied. I had driven down John J. Williams Highway that morning with no intention of looking for stones at all. An ordinary trip to the supermarket had unexpectedly led me into the Rock Pile, a place filled with more natural stone than I could possibly take in at once. I had already spent hours climbing around the piles, turning stones, touching them, studying them, and searching for one that felt right. I had found Dunmore. For most people, that would have been enough.

But I wasn't finished looking.

I walked back into the piles.

By then, I was no longer simply amazed by the amount of stone surrounding me. I had begun to slow down and pay attention. Everywhere I looked there were possibilities. Some stones were partially hidden beneath others. Some were too large to even consider. Others could be rolled or shifted just enough to expose a different side. Every time I moved one, there seemed to be another underneath it. The deeper I searched, the more I realized that finding the right stone was not about choosing the first one that looked heavy.

I wanted to feel a connection with it.

So, I kept putting my hands on stone after stone.

I would feel the surface beneath my palms, look at the contours, search for a possible grip, and try to move it. Sometimes a stone immediately told me, through its shape or size, that it wasn't the one I wanted. Other times I would stay with it longer, turning it and imagining what it might feel like against my chest.

Then I came across another one.

There was something about this stone that made me stop.

I had already selected an 185-pound challenge, yet this one seemed to be asking something more of me. I put my hands on it, tried to understand its shape, and knew that I wanted it to be weighed.

One of the employees brought the equipment over and lifted the stone onto the scale.

I watched the number settle.

Exactly 200 pounds.

There is something about seeing that number attached to a natural stone that changes the way you look at it. Two hundred pounds on a barbell is simply a number made up of steel and plates. Two hundred pounds of natural stone is different. There are no handles, no perfectly balanced sides, no knurling for your hands, and no guarantee that the position you want to use is the position the stone will allow.

I looked at it knowing exactly what the number meant.

And I wanted it anyway.

The second stone was coming home.

The employees helped load Dunmore and this new 200-pound stone into my vehicle. Together, they weighed 385 pounds. Somewhere between pulling into the Rock Pile and driving away that day, an ordinary trip to the supermarket had become one of the defining moments in my stone-lifting journey.

When I arrived home, however, owning the stones was the easy part.

Now I had to learn them.

For the next couple of days, I spent time around both stones. I turned them, touched them, studied their surfaces, and experimented with different hand positions. Dunmore had its own personality, but the 200-pound stone presented another level of challenge. Its weight was greater, its shape was different, and whatever I had learned from Genesis, Hudson, Plattekill, or even Dunmore could not simply be copied and applied to this one.

That was becoming one of the great lessons of natural stone lifting.

Every stone starts the conversation over.

You may bring experience to it. You may bring strength. You may bring confidence from every stone you have lifted before. But when your hands touch a new natural stone for the first time, you still have to listen. You have to find its balance, understand its shape, discover where your hands belong, and learn how it wants to move.

This 200-pound stone demanded that from me.

There was also something else happening that I didn't completely understand at the time. When I first entered the Rock Pile, I had been overwhelmed by the sheer number of stones around me. By the time I left, I had chosen two.

Thousands had remained behind.

These two had come home.

That began to mean something to me. I was no longer simply accumulating heavy objects to train with. I was beginning to recognize individual stones—to remember where they came from, how I found them, what they demanded from me, and what I learned while trying to lift them.

The collection was beginning to develop an identity.

The 200-pound stone needed a name that reflected that identity. I wanted something that sounded as though it belonged beside Genesis, Hudson, Plattekill, Dunmore. I wanted a name with the feeling of the old lifting stones and the landscapes that had inspired my journey.

It became the Highland Stone.

WHY Highland?

There is something about the name Highland that feels as though it belongs to the land. It carries the sound of the Scottish Highlands and the old Gaelic landscape from which so much traditional stone-lifting history emerged. The name evokes a great glen—a broad valley surrounded by rugged country, a place shaped by earth, stone, weather, and time.

That image suited this stone.

Highland was not created for me. It was not manufactured to fit my hands. Long before I ever drove down John J. Williams Highway, the stone already existed somewhere in the earth. Somehow it eventually found its way into one of those enormous piles at the Rock Pile. Then, on a day when I wasn't even looking for stones, our paths crossed.

I will never know where Highland was before that.

I don't know what piece of ground once held it, how far it traveled, what machinery moved it, or how many hands touched it before mine. I only know the point at which our stories met.

And from that point forward, its history would no longer be completely unknown.

THE TRADITION OF HIGHLAND

The Highland Stone shall remain the sixth stone of the Seven. Genesis represents Beginning. Hudson represents Roots. Plattekill represents Foundation. Dunmore represents Resolve. Glenmore represents Adversity. Highland represents Tradition.

Tradition is not simply something old. It is something that has been valued enough to be remembered, practiced, and passed from one person to the next. Long before I began lifting natural stones, men in Scotland and other parts of the world were testing themselves against stones that became connected to families, villages, farms, and generations of lifters.

Those stories were part of what drew me toward traditional stone lifting. The weight mattered, but the story surrounding the stone mattered just as much. A stone could remain in one place

when generations came and went, and each lifter who approached it became another small part of its history.

The Highland Stone represents that idea for me.

At exactly 200 pounds, it marked another important step in the progression of the Seven, but its meaning became larger than the number on the scale. Highland became a reminder that this journey did not begin with me. I was inspired by lifters who came before, by old stones whose names and stories survived because people believed they were worth remembering.

Every tradition has to begin somewhere. The stones that are considered historic today once had a first lifter. Their stories once had a first day. At some point, someone decided that the stone, the challenge, and the people connected to it were worth remembering.

That is how traditions are created.

The Highland Stone shall carry that lesson forward. It represents respect for those who came before, the challenge placed before the lifter today, and the responsibility to leave something meaningful for those who come after.

Years from now, another lifter may stand over Highland and know exactly why it was given its name. They may understand that the stone was not brought into the Seven because anyone believed it had some ancient history of its own. Its story began here, in our time, but its purpose was inspired by traditions much older than us.

Perhaps that future lifter will place their hands on the stone, attempt the lift, and then add their own name and experience to its history. In that moment, the tradition continues.

The stone itself may never reveal where it was before the Rock Pile or how far it traveled before our paths crossed. But from the moment it became Highland, its future became something we could preserve.

And now, so, will those who come after me.

Genesis taught me to begin. Hudson reminded me where I came from. Plattekill taught me to learn from what stood in front of me. Dunmore taught me to deliberately choose a challenge. Glenmore taught me that adversity can force us to change. Highland taught me that strength becomes more meaningful when it is connected to something larger than us.

Six stones. Six lessons.

And one final challenge was still waiting ahead.



STONE VII
BRAVO STONE
The Final Stone



Origin: Rock Pit Acquisition
Weight: 276 Pounds

THE STORY OF THE BRAVO STONE

The Stone of Mastery

Some stones enter your life unexpectedly, some are chosen because they present a challenge, and some seem to mark the end of one journey and the beginning of another. The Bravo Stone was one of those.

I returned to the Rock Pile in Delaware with a very specific purpose. By then, I already knew what I was looking for. I wanted a natural stone heavier than anything I had brought home before. I was not searching for something comfortable or something I already knew I could lift. I wanted a stone that would stand beyond my present ability and give me something greater to work toward.

I spent hours walking through the massive piles of stone. There were stones everywhere, each one different in size, shape, texture, and color. I moved them around, rolled them away from one another, placed my hands on them, and tried to get a sense of each one. I was not simply looking for the heaviest stone I could find. I was looking for the right stone, something that created the same kind of connection I had felt with other stones along the way.

Some stones looked promising from a distance but felt wrong once I placed my hands on them. Others had interesting shapes but did not feel like something I wanted to bring home. I kept walking, moving, touching, turning, and studying them, waiting for one to stand apart from the rest.

Eventually, I came upon a pile that looked different from many of the others. From what the owner explained to me; these were referred to as tiger stones because of their distinctive coloring. They were lighter and clearer in appearance, with orange-colored streaks running through some of them like the markings of a tiger. That immediately caught my attention.

I began working my way through that pile, moving stones aside and laying different ones out where I could see them better. I rolled them, studied their surfaces, felt their edges, and looked at their angles. Then I found it. The stone had everything I had been searching for. It was large, dense, and substantial, but its edges were surprisingly smooth. Its shape had angles that made it interesting without making it impossible to imagine lifting. When I placed my hands on it, something felt right.

I wanted to know what it weighed, so, I asked them to take the stone over to the weighing station. I watched as it was placed on the scale, and the number that appeared surprised me: 276 pounds. I had been looking for something heavy, but 276 pounds was far beyond the other stones in my collection. It was seventy-six pounds heavier than the 200-pound Highland Stone and represented an entirely different level of challenge.

That number did not make me walk away. It pulled me in even more. The moment I saw 276 pounds on the scale, I knew this was the stone I had been looking for. I knew it would become the heaviest stone in my collection, and I also knew it would be the final one. I did not need another stone after this. I had found the challenge I wanted.

There was something important about bringing home a stone I could not simply walk up to and master immediately. I did not choose it because I knew I could lift it. I chose it because I knew I would have to become stronger, more technically capable, more patient, and more experienced before the stone would ever truly be mine to lift. That was exactly what I wanted from the final stone of the Seven.

For a time, I called the stone Monarch. The name represented its place at the top of the collection, the heaviest and final stone of the Seven. It seemed appropriate for a stone that stood above the others in weight and difficulty, but the stone had not yet received the name that would ultimately mean the most to me.

That happened later.

It was Labor Day weekend of 2026 when Michael came over, and we had the opportunity to train together. During the session, he saw the 276-pound stone for the first time. I had never told him that I had already given it a name, and I had never explained what I had been calling it. He simply looked at the stone, studied the distinctive marking running across it, and immediately made a connection that I had never considered. The lighter-colored surface carried an orange-yellow streak that rose across the stone at an angle, and the moment Michael saw it, something familiar came to mind.

Johnny Bravo.

Johnny Bravo was a cartoon character known for his unmistakable blond hair, rising upward and sweeping at a sharp angle. Years earlier, my son had given me a small Johnny Bravo weightlifting figure, and I still had it. Because of that gift, the image was immediately familiar to me. When Michael looked at the stone and said it should be called the Bravo Stone, I knew exactly what he was seeing. The angled yellow orange marking across the stone reminded him of Johnny Bravo's distinctive hair. What began as an observation during a Labor Day weekend training session suddenly gave the stone a name with a much more personal connection.

What made the moment meaningful was that I had not suggested it. Michael had not been told about Monarch. He simply looked at the stone, saw something in it, and gave it an identity that connected the stone to a real moment in our lives. That mattered to me because the name was no longer only about the stone's position in the collection. Monarch described where the stone stood among the Seven, but Bravo gave it a story and a connection that I would always remember.

The Bravo Stone.

THE TRADITION OF BRAVO

The Bravo Stone shall remain the seventh and final stone of the Seven. Genesis represents Beginning. Hudson represents Roots. Plattekill represents Foundation. Dunmore represents Resolve. Glenmore represents Adversity. Highland represents Tradition. Bravo represents Mastery.

But mastery does not mean that the journey is finished. Mastery is the willingness to continue working toward something that remains beyond you. It is the understanding that strength is built over time, technique is earned through experience, and some challenges deserve to remain difficult because of what they require us to become.

The Bravo Stone represents that challenge for me. At 276 pounds, it stands apart from the other stones in the collection. The seventy-six-pound jump from Highland to Bravo is significant, and I understood that from the moment I saw the number on the scale. I did not bring this stone home expecting immediate success. I brought it home because I wanted something that would require everything the previous six stones had taught me: Beginning, Roots, Foundation, Resolve, Adversity, and Tradition. All of those lessons lead here.

Years from now, someone may stand over the Bravo Stone and see only 276 pounds of natural stone in front of them. They may wonder whether they can lift it. They may place their hands along its smooth edges, search for the correct position, brace themselves, and pull. Perhaps the stone will rise, or perhaps it will not. Either result has meaning because there may come a day when the only victory is getting the slightest movement from the ground. A small break from the earth, a little air beneath the stone, may represent months or years of work finally beginning to show itself.

Mastery is not measured only by the final lift. It is measured by what we become while pursuing it. Every attempt teaches something. Every failure exposes something. Every small improvement brings the lifter one step closer, not only to moving the stone, but to understanding what the stone demands.

If a future lifter knows the story, perhaps they will picture the Rock Pile in Delaware and imagine me spending hours walking among thousands of stones, rolling them, moving them aside, placing my hands against their surfaces, and searching for the one that felt right. Eventually, they will picture that pile of tiger stones and see the lighter-colored rock with its orange stripe. They will imagine it being carried to the weighing station and the number appearing on the scale: 276 pounds, the heaviest stone and the final stone.

Then perhaps they will picture another moment later, when Michael stood beside it during a training session, looked at that angled yellow-orange marking, and saw something nobody else

had seen. Johnny Bravo. That moment gave the stone something weight alone never could give it: a personal connection and a name born from a memory.

The heaviest stone in the collection was chosen because of the challenge it represented, but its permanent name came from someone I wanted to remember. That is why it will remain the Bravo Stone. The name preserves the moment Michael looked at it and saw something familiar, something personal, and something that immediately made sense.

The stone may someday be lifted by people who never knew the circumstances surrounding the day I found it. It may be touched by my family, members of the Stone Brotherhood, or lifters who come long after me. They may approach it with abilities greater than mine and perhaps accomplish things that I never could. That is exactly how a tradition should grow.

The goal was never for these stones to belong to one man forever. I was simply their first keeper. My responsibility is to preserve their stories, pass along what they taught me, and leave enough behind that the people who come after me understand that each stone represented more than a number on a scale.

Genesis taught me to begin. Hudson reminded me where I came from. Plattekill taught me to learn from what stood in front of me. Dunmore taught me to deliberately choose a challenge. Glenmore taught me to change when adversity demanded it. Highland connected my journey to the traditions that inspired it. Bravo reminds me that mastery is not a destination, but the person we become while pursuing something greater than ourselves.

Seven stones, seven lessons, and with the Bravo Stone, the Seven were complete.

THE FIRST KEEPER

The Seven Stones were never meant to become a collection of objects sitting quietly in one place. Each one entered my life differently, and each one taught me something I did not fully understand when I first placed my hands on it. Genesis taught me to begin. Hudson reminded me of my roots. Plattekill taught me to learn from what stood in front of me. Dunmore taught me to choose a challenge deliberately. Glenmore taught me that adversity sometimes requires us to change. Highland connected my journey to the traditions that came before me. Bravo taught me that mastery is not the end of the road, but the person we become while walking it.

Their tradition begins here, in 2026. They are not ancient lifting stones with forgotten legends behind them, and I would never pretend otherwise. Their history is being built forward, one lift, one story, and one person at a time. That is what gives them meaning. The stones themselves may be old beyond anything I can know, but the tradition of the Seven begins with us.

Years from now, someone else may stand over these stones. They may be stronger than I was, or they may struggle in exactly the same places I did. They may succeed where I failed, and perhaps they will add their own names, memories, and stories to what began here. They may approach the stones differently, learn lessons I never considered, and carry the tradition in directions I could not have imagined.

That is what I hope for.

I hope the Seven continue to be lifted, respected, remembered, and passed forward. I hope the people who come after me understand that the weight was only part of the story. The greater meaning was always found in the effort, the lessons, the relationships, and the memories created around them.

The stones were here before I knew them, and if they are cared for, they will remain long after me. My part was simply to find them, learn from them, preserve their stories, and give the tradition a place to begin.

These stones were never meant to belong to one man.

I was simply their first keeper.

Begin. Build. Endure. Pass it on.