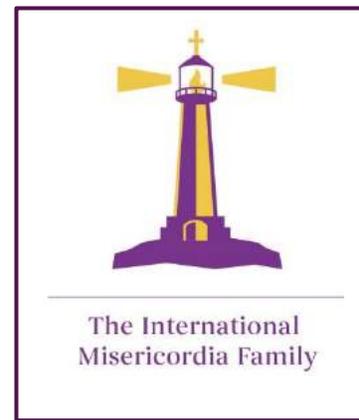


# Mercy in Action in The International Misericordia Family



## Innocent but Devastated

*Gary Nolan*

### Mercy's power to heal and build bonds

As I listened to Mary's story (Mary a fictitious name) about being molested by her brother, raped by six others, and later abused again by another, my mind travelled back fifty years to an accident that happened to my best friend which left him a quadriplegic. He was at the wrong place at the wrong time with the wrong people. He was a victim—an innocent victim but would live with consequences for something he didn't deserve and did not provoke. Mary was also an innocent victim and would pay the consequences for something she didn't deserve and didn't provoke. But mercy has a way to heal and build relationships.

The difference between the accident victims was Mary's scars were invisible. No one could see the indignity, humiliation, and debilitating effects she lived with everyday--effects on a young teen between twelve and seventeen who suffered alone and in silence.

When she presented herself at one of the Misericordia Sisters mission homes, she carried a lot of guilt. But there was one more debilitating torment--she felt she had committed the unforgiveable sin by having an abortion. Although mercy was not part of her vocabulary then, she would come to understand its value.

### It takes a village ...

The expression, *"It takes a village to raise a child"* has truth in it. Many people in a community add their talents, experience, and insights to help a person become mature. It is the same with mercy. When mothers come to one of the International Misericordia Family missions, they quickly realize that practicing mercy for the people who work there is a way of life and many apply mercy in different ways. Mary quickly understood that in her case, mercy was possible. Gradually, she began confiding in people at the mission home. The association with the people there helped her to progress in different ways.

For example, before coming to the Misericordia mission home, she had filed a police report. Sadly, there was no follow up by the authorities. However, Mary's accompanier, who had gained Mary's confidence and became a lifelong friend, assisted Mary in undertaking the steps to pursue justice in the courts once again. This was difficult as Mary had to relive being judged and humiliated, but it had a positive effect. The proceedings crystallized what had happened to her and put things in their proper context. She now had a label for certain actions and things became clearer.

The regular discussions and association with others had beneficial effects on Mary. One of the determining meetings was with Sister Jeannette Gauttier. The Sister's explanation of the work and the life of Rosalie profoundly touched Mary. She fell in love with the mission and wanted to be part of Rosalie's work. This led to other changes that influenced Mary's behaviour.

### **Creating bonds**

Mercy creates deep relationships. Mary became part of the parent's group and was able to extend mercy to others. She understood their pain, and her words conveyed valuable experience and relief to the mothers. She was always open to giving her testimonial and speaking about the mission of the Sisters. Mercy became a key element in not only the raising of her son but also in understanding her own mother. She realized that her mother could not protect her, nor did she know how. Time and the kindness of the group gave Mary enough time to grow and understand her family.

Mary had many qualities also but needed the right environment to express them. Through all the painful situations, the accompanier mentioned how agreeable and fun it was to be with Mary. The accompanier could see Mary flourishing under mercy's quality and how Mary helped others grow in mercy. It was never a burden to be in Mary's company or extend a hand. Because she was diagnosed with cancer and needed assistance to organize the kids, be taken to the hospital for surgery, and then follow up with the treatments, she and her accompanier had the time to shed many tears of joy and sorrow on the forty-five-minute drives to the treatment centre.

There was not only this bond of attachment with her accompanier as a sign of mercy. Mercy was to play a deeper role in Mary's life.

### **The most difficult people to forgive**

Two of the most difficult people to forgive are often ourselves and the one who has profoundly hurt us. Mary confronted both situations when the brother was dying in the hospital. Before his death, Mary did not have much contact with her brother.

Intuition told her to pay a visit to the hospital, and when she did a very emotional meeting took place. With a social worker by the bedside, the brother, upon seeing Mary, screamed that he should be in jail for murder as he killed part of his sister. Mary had mentally forgiven him but never expressed it. She reasoned that he had been abused also. Over time the brother had sincerely regretted his actions and tried to make amends. Mary knew that he deeply regretted his behaviour and she could understand his actions.

When we forgive others, we forgive ourselves also. She followed up the forgiveness by taking care of the funeral arrangements and keeping some of his ashes. She feels that this way the relationship continues. Mary makes it clear that the forgiveness was not to allow her brother to die in peace, but because she truly believed her brother regretted his actions and deserved mercy and forgiveness.

### **Making the best of an unfair situation**

Everyone who is an innocent victim must make the best of a difficult situation. Mary did this. By accepting the mercy offered to her by the loving members of the mission, she was able with the accompanier to approach the authorities in order to protect others. She uses her experience to show other mothers the dignity and respect they deserve. Mercy gave Mary permission to forgive herself and that freed her to be able to assist others.

Mercy has few rules and few limits. From a word that did not exist in Mary's vocabulary, to practicing mercy everyday, her story demonstrates mercy's power to bring a person dignity and respect. It highlights the influence it has in building relationships and transmits the healing power to forgive ourselves and others.

**We all have the privilege to show someone, somewhere, dignity and respect everyday through acts of mercy.**