

# Mercy in Action in The International Misericordia Family

## Jane Tests Mercy's Longevity, Faithfulness, Forgiveness

*Gary Nolan*



The theme for this month's newsletter is rebirth, and the next story dovetails perfectly with the theme.

When Jane (not her real name) showed up with her son at one of the Misericordia organisations two decades ago, she epitomized every reason Rosalie was called to give dignity, help, and support to mothers. Jane was distraught, destitute, emotionally homeless, abandoned, and illiterate. Added to her woes, her son had serious learning difficulties. If bereft could be personified, Jane was its ambassador par excellence.

### **Needs that surpassed the imagination**

With needs that surpassed the imagination, social workers could have judged Jane unfit as a mother, and in turn she could have lost the custody of her child. Next, if she had been put on a government program to help her son with his learning disability, within a week she would have dropped out, leaving her and her son with a bleak future.

However, our Misericordia organisation understood exactly what Jane, and everyone else who shows up at the door, needed-- a family setting with a lot of love, a lot of mercy, and a lot of time, with emphasis on a lot.

### **Jane's new world**

From the outset, Jane entered a world she never knew—a loving, non-judgmental environment. Little-by-little Mercy's healing attributes of Mercy started the process of imparting self-worth, dignity, the capacity to form loving relationships, and basic motherhood skills. The organisation also conveyed a sense of self-respect, showing Jane how to dress properly when looking for employment and what was proper vocabulary in certain circumstances.

As weeks, months, and then years wore on, through the organisation, Mercy restored some emotional balance and lessened survival mechanisms that would lead to more harmonious relationships.

### **Confronting unexpected challenges**

As Jane acquired the aptitudes of motherhood, the Misericordia milieu was confronted with new challenges. Jane's child had learning problems that required immediate attention. This meant weekly visits to a specialist. But Jane was not equipped to follow the instructions or accompany her son to the healthcare professional. On her own, she would have left the program, leaving her son with a lifelong impediment and frustrating future. Therefore, the accompanier took the son for his weekly visits.

These weekly visits lasted more than a year. After each visit the accompanier would take the boy for a treat, and then home where the information was conveyed to Jane. She, in turn, was taught how to follow the instructions. The daycare staff knew about the problem and participated in the boy's progress.

The milieu continued accompanying the boy into his formal school years, where the accompanier worked with teachers and educators. Results were obvious, but once again an unexpected disappointment awaited.

### **Mercy confronts deception**

Helping someone through distress is one thing, but helping after being lied to is another. Those who accompanied Jane faced this situation as she had not been completely honest with the personnel. This was disappointing for everyone who had put their heart into Jane's success. Often, dishonesty ends or changes a relationship. Now the question that had to be answered was, what would the Misericordia family do?

### **Mercy's unique challenges**

To be successful when confronting disappointment, it means being prepared beforehand. But how do you prepare for something you can't identify yet? The Mission recounts how Rosalie and the Sisters' example, along with the Mission's weekly discussions on Mercy, imparted strength, gave insight, and kept the group focussed. These weekly discussions centered on ways to expand Mercy's application toward others and the discussions played an important role in seeing Jane's circumstance in the right light.

Looking through the lens of Mercy, the members understood the reason for Jane's actions. They also knew that Mercy has few rules and no instruction manual, but it does have a purpose—achieving the best results for everyone. The milieu concluded that Mercy had not finished its work and their decision to continue helping the family contributed to a future no one could have foreseen.

It is important to mention that Jane also had wonderful qualities. She loved others and was helpful. What she needed was someone to show her how to express her qualities. The staff helped Jane reach her full potential and the strength to surpass her obstacles. Eventually she learned to have a relationship with others. Her son not only entered school in a regular class, he finished school and now holds a steady job. Both have become contributing members of society.

Throughout the decades, the teenager and mother developed strong bonds with the members of the organization. Like a natural family, they still visit the companions.

Because Mercy is unique, it confronts unique and unexpected challenges as Jane's story highlights. Continually reflecting on how Mercy can be developed and extended to others in our environment sharpens Mercy's focus and prepares us to confront the unexpected. When Jane first arrived, she was the personification of being destitute, but the staff personified Rosalie and the Sisters' Mercy, in part, because of their preparedness.

### **An answer that needs no comment**

During the interview that served as the basis for this article, the members were asked what their greatest accomplishment was over the 30 years. Humbly, they directed attention to Mercy and not to personal feats. Their answer was simple but insightful: "It was, and is, a privilege to show what a wonderful quality Mercy is, and it is an honour to have the opportunity to express, teach, and convey it to others everyday in the image of Rosalie and the Sisters."

May those words express our thoughts everyday!