

Mercy Story One – January

No one could understand why he put up with it for so long. Every winter for years when he was forced to leave home to earn a living for his family by working in the bush, his wife, the mother of his children, lost control. She'd leave the younger children in the care of the older ones for days on end and just disappear into a life of drinking and carrying on with other men.

When he came home in the spring, she'd sober up and return to her duties in the family.

He accepted as his own all the children that came along at a time when he could not possibly have been their father. He was "Dad" to them all, without distinction.

A man of few words, his response to those who urged him to leave her and find a better wife was simply, "I love her."

Now and then he was also heard to say, "There's a saint in there. You'll see."

The crucifix that never left his pocket was worn smooth from constant gentle rubbing.

It happened shortly after their 25th Wedding Anniversary, a strained affair.

Everything abruptly changed. He was offered a permanent job closer to home. She quit drinking and running around. Their younger children experienced a mother who was "always there for us". The whole family prayed the Rosary every evening around the supper table and never missed Sunday Mass. Their home became a haven in their troubled community. And they themselves became role models for a whole generation of young people, proof that it was still possible to create a happy family even in the chaos of a larger community in an advanced state of disintegration and quiet despair.

Years later, after they had left this world, a great-granddaughter of theirs insisted on setting the date for her wedding on their wedding anniversary. No one in the family had to be told why.

The older and more wrinkled they got, the easier it was to see their love for one another etched all over their faces. Their eyes never tired of twinkling at each other. For those who knew them well, this was unmistakably the sweet fruit of years of apparently fruitless Mercy on his part.

The shiny Crucifix that never left his pocket told the whole story. How can your source of Mercy for someone else dry up when it keeps flowing to you from the Cross of Jesus, Mercy Itself?

How can you fail to forgive anyone when the Saviour has looked straight at you, and prayed:

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"? (*Luke 23:34*)