

### Mercy Story Three – March

*“So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from the heart.” (Matthew 18:35)*

That one statement from the mouth of Jesus, cited by her priest in Confession when she was 18, was all it took to turn her away from Mass and drive her out of the Church for nearly a decade.

Forgive **“her”**? After everything “she” had done to her under the cover of secrecy, all the lies, all the cover-ups, all the veiled threats? Not **“her”**! Impossible! Was Jesus crazy or something?

Nobody had suspected a thing. After all, “she” was the school principal who needed a little help around the house, what with all “her” outside obligations. To be offered a job which involved spending a few hours each week cleaning house and tidying up for the principal was a dream job for a kid her age. And besides, “her” house was just across the back alley.

She had only been working for “her” for a few weeks when it all began. One day when she came to work, something must have been bothering her a little. “She” picked up on it and led her into the bedroom “for a few minutes of stress therapy”. Naïve and trusting, like a lamb led to the slaughter, she followed “her”. And it went on from there. Her folks were proud of all the bonuses she got for her “outstanding work”. But most of her time was spent in “stress therapy”, not work.

Six years of it! Nobody could figure out why she was always agitated and depressed. The happy-go-lucky kid became a sulking teen-ager. Which, of course, required even more “stress therapy”.

She could hardly wait to graduate and get away from home! That’s when she spilled everything out in Confession and panicked at what she thought her priest told her she had to do, or else....

There followed years of identity crisis, inner turmoil, self-hatred, self-doubt, acting out, alcohol abuse, and constant flight from relationships that turned abusive. Until Jim came along....

He looked her in the eye. He touched her respectfully. They did things together just because he enjoyed being with her. He told her she was beautiful, and it wasn’t an excuse for abusing her. Her excessive drinking dropped way off. He took her to Mass with him. She went for his sake.

One day Jim proposed. She said yes. So they went to see their priest. The initial interviews, conducted separately, lasted 10 minutes for him and an hour and a half for her. It was like a boil bursting. She told Father all about her six years of hell as a child and teenager, and how badly it had messed her up after she left home. She even told him about that awful Confession that had left her without hope. Father wept with her, and together they worked through the entire passage in which Jesus’ strong words on forgiveness are found. She learned that Jesus’ words would apply to her only if the principal came to her, begged for her forgiveness, and asked for mercy.

“I’d have to forgive her then,” she said. “Especially when I think of all the people I used in one way or another until Jim came along. I can’t expect God to forgive me if I couldn’t forgive her.”