

BLESSINGS IN DISGUISE

The Johnny Series

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When Johnny first came to live at our Foster Home, he put me in mind of the cave-man movies. You know the kind, where they eat with their fingers and run around wildly.

Johnny was 18 years old. He couldn't speak, he ate with his deformed hands, and he was blind in his right eye that was scarred over from glaucoma.

He was very destructive, and hyper.





When Johnny's case manager asked us to take him into our home I was very skeptical.

We had been fostering "normal" children for quite some time, and the thought of taking on a deformed, severely mentally impaired adult with the mentality of a toddler was not a challenge I was sure we were suited to handle.

After much discussion, and with great reluctance, I agreed to give it a "trial run" for the weekend.

Johnny came on a Friday and never sat still the entire day. Because he didn't talk, I didn't even try to communicate with him.

He required constant watching and total care. He had to be bathed *and* dressed. He couldn't even brush his own teeth.



I could not accept the fact that he didn't even have these very basic skills and assumed he was just being difficult.

Therefore, I dished out orders like a "drill sergeant" when I wanted him to cooperate, and was frustrated when he did not respond.

Dinner was a disgusting experience. Not knowing *what* foods Johnny liked or was able to eat I decided on mushroom soup with enough crackers in it to give it a consistency he could manage to eat with his fingers.

Though I tried to make him use his spoon, he insisted on eating with his fingers. He seemed to thoroughly enjoy his simple dinner and things were tolerable until he sneezed with a mouth full of food.



The sneeze created an “explosion” of mushroom soup clear across the table, hitting the patio door on the other side of the room.



Our “normal kids” lost all interest in finishing dinner at that point, and we all left the table—all except Jack and Johnny. Jack cleaned up the mess and then sat there with Johnny as the two of them finished their meal in silence.

I was feeling so many mixed emotions, especially guilt for “deserting” Jack. Surely, if Jack could find patience for dealing with this young man, I could too, couldn’t I? I was gentler with Johnny that evening as I got him ready and tucked him into bed. He smiled innocently at me as I tucked the covers in around him and told him goodnight.

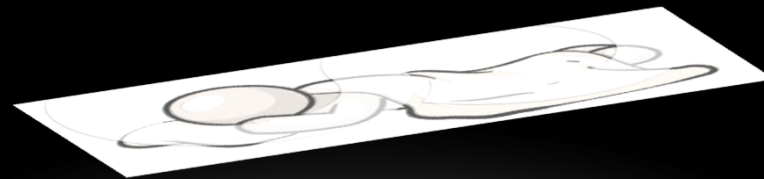


Within five minutes he was up laughing and running around the house. He would run into the other bedrooms and giggle over the top of the person trying to sleep, “enticing” them to play his little game of putting foreheads together, trying to keep from being the first to blink. He would then grab things that didn’t belong to him just to get their reaction.



We scolded him and put him back to bed several times, and after about three hours of repeating this procedure, I said, "that's it, I can't do this". Jack knew I was tired and suggested I go to bed and rest, and let him try to get Johnny settled.

I awoke in the middle of the night and Jack still was not beside me. I wandered upstairs to check on things and there he was, sleeping on the floor outside Johnny's bedroom. My heart lurched at the sight. Every time Johnny would get up, Jack would put him right back to bed. I lovingly kissed my very patient husband, and with pangs of guilt went back to my own comfortable bed.



The next day went a little smoother but we were all exhausted by days end. We hoped Johnny would be tired enough to sleep the night through. He was NOT.

Jack spent ANOTHER night camped outside Johnny's bedroom and I spent another night alone in our bed. By Sunday I had enough and announced to my husband, "That's it. We tried, God knows we tried, but this is not working out.



I am calling his case manager tomorrow and telling her that we cannot bring Johnny into our home." Jack, being the ever-tender, ever-loving, problem-solving man that he is felt that we should give Johnny an opportunity to adjust, but my mind was made up.

By the end of the day on Sunday we were beginning to notice that Johnny was responding to some of our requests. My heart began to soften despite how hard I tried to fight it.

Still, I stubbornly refused to give in. After all, I had already made a decision and I was going to stick with it. However, by now, the whole family was beginning to say things like, "look how cute he is when he smiles", or "isn't he cute with such blond hair and dark eyebrows"?



That evening he clumsily used a fork for supper and rewarded us with one of his special smiles when praised for his attempts. He slept that entire night through.





I did call Johnny's case manager the next day. I asked her to bring the rest of Johnny's things over to our house because we had decided to keep him. It seemed that no one in the world cared about Johnny or wanted to share in his life or visit him.

From that day forward, Johnny never left our home except for an occasional overnight stay in the hospital. He didn't go home on holidays, or birthdays. He was *ours*.

Johnny was the center of life in our foster home, and at times, it seemed that he was the "bridge" to my relationship with all the others. Yes, I know now that God sent Johnny to be a blessing in our home. I am so glad that I didn't throw that blessing away.

It is true that we ourselves are blessed the most when we are helping others. Jesus said, "If you have done it unto the least...you have done it unto me".

I have learned that if I look for the blessings that are often disguised, it will be well worth my while.



THE END

