

Extraordinary Story Unfolds in Arizona



When Catherine Amiot, the Executive Director of Mission of Mercy in Arizona, woke up on that hot September morning, she never dreamt it would become a day right out of a fairy tale. It began with a phone call from a brokerage house, letting her know that Mission of Mercy was the beneficiary of a large sum of money, bequeathed by an unknown donor. And, there were more calls to come, as the story of the gift unfolded.

Rita Belle, a volunteer nurse for Mission of Mercy at the Mesa, Arizona clinic, had befriended a homeless man 10 years earlier. Ms. Belle first noticed Richard Walters when she was leaving a Scottsdale (AZ) Senior Center after her aerobics class. In time, Rita struck up a conversation with the “neat and clean” man with the baseball cap and backpack. Little did she know that the alley behind the Senior Center was home to Mr. Walters. It was several years later when Rita had an air conditioning problem that she asked Richard, a retired mechanical engineer, for help. The number he gave her turned out to be for the Scottsdale Senior Center pay phone. It was only then that Rita learned Richard was homeless. During their 10-year friendship, Rita shared both her personal story and her experiences as a volunteer nurse for Mission of Mercy with him. Their conversations were the beginning of a friendship that changed the lives of both Rita and Richard.

Rita often helped Mr. Walters with his doctor’s appointments, grocery shopping, and cooking. She eventually found him housing at several low cost transitional housing complexes. However, Walters would become restless, and in a short time, would leave his modest dwelling for life on the streets. After numerous attempts to relocate Richard into a safer environment, Rita accepted that street living was Richard’s preference. Rita continued working for Mission of Mercy and Richard continued to stay in her life.

Richard Walters was an extraordinary man to make the choice to live on the street. He possessed a brilliant mind and was highly educated. He graduated with honors from Purdue University and received a Masters Degree in Engineering from Ball State University. He served in the United States Marine Corps during the Korean Conflict. He was employed for 23 years as a jet propulsion engineer with Allied Signal Aerospace (now Honeywell).

Walters never married and had no children. After he was forced into early retirement, he dropped out of the mainstream and spent most of his time on the streets. Despite his brilliant and analytical mind, he had no social skills. He was estranged from his two brothers and had no friends...at least until he providentially crossed paths with Rita Belle. Although Richard was an avowed atheist, Rita continued to be a spiritual witness to him. After he was diagnosed with terminal

health issues, Rita assisted him through a spiritual conversion and to a personal relationship with Christ. Shortly before his death, he was baptized into the Catholic Church and received Holy Communion. This self made man, who led a life of quiet desperation, died at the age of 77 on August 19, 2007. Walters had a full Catholic funeral on October 9th at the Lady of Perpetual Help in Scottsdale Arizona and was buried with full military honors at the Military Cemetery in Phoenix.

Unknown to all but Rita and his estate attorney, this quiet man of the streets was a multi-millionaire. Although his life was filled with uncertainty and change, he had orchestrated his legacy with certainty and determination. In the end, Richard Walters left his entire fortune to a variety of charities, including Mission of Mercy. The phone call in September to Catherine Amiot was to inform her that Mission of Mercy would receive a gift from Richard Walters's estate estimated to be in excess of \$400,000.

This gift from a reclusive stranger, known mostly for his baseball cap and backpack, will allow countless people who live in the shadows of society as Walters did, to receive vital medical services and compassionate care. Walters, who found his own personal redemption in the waning days of his life, has left an extraordinary legacy of help and hope to an entire community. God bless you, Richard Leroy Walters!