

# A Calamity Calmed by a Kindness

## Mary Anne Gamba '78



*The Gamba family made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the spring of this year; this photo was taken one morning on the Sea of Galilee. Pictured, far right, are Mary Anne Gamba and her husband, John; seated side by side behind them are their daughter, Beth, and son, John Jr. Seated below is the family's Holy Land guide, Soshi.*

On a bright fall day in 1977, a tearful woman sat across from Sister Patrice Werner, O.P., then the director of concurrent education at Caldwell College for Women. The woman, Mary Anne Gamba, R.N., an adult student and the mother of two young children, was at the top of her class with a 4.0 average. That semester, despite carrying a grueling course load that included a much-dreaded class in statistics and an independent study, Gamba juggled her responsibilities, always keeping her eye on the prize: a Caldwell College diploma.

Fate intervened. With only six credits left to accrue, Gamba received some good news—bad news from her husband, John: he had accepted an excellent job offer, but the position was in Pennsylvania, so the family would have to relocate—and fast. While thrilled for her husband, Gamba learned upon reading the college handbook that she would have to complete the balance of her credits on campus. All at once, it seemed her cherished dream of attaining a Caldwell diploma was no longer within her grasp.

To add to her stress, while her husband was working in Pennsylvania, Gamba had an arm's-length list of tasks to complete on her own. She needed to sell the family home in New Jersey, find a new home in Pennsylvania, enroll her children in new schools, choose new pediatricians and coordinate a myriad of other time-sensitive tasks—all while planning the family's traditional Christmas, studying and staying on top of her classwork.

Imagine her relief, then, as she sat anxiously in Sister Patrice's office, hearing Sister say kindly, "Go finish your last two courses at Immaculata College [in Pennsylvania], send the transcript back to me and you will have a Caldwell degree."

"Just like that. Really? Bless her!" says Gamba, who adds, "Even after forty years have passed, remembering Sister's gentle kindness bring tears to my eyes. I have tried to emulate that kindness with those who have passed my way."

After graduating from Caldwell, Gamba became a nurse-social worker in a Head

Start program, an experience that changed her life. Seeing firsthand the devastating impact of racial and institutional discrimination on the lives of children lit a fire within her, motivating her to learn more about the complex issues of race and socioeconomics in American society. She enrolled in the University of Pennsylvania, earning a master's degree in sociology, after which she taught sociology at a community college. She worked as an advocate by increasing voter registration in her community, managing school board campaigns for like-minded candidates and serving as a school volunteer.

Education and philanthropy are core values in the Gamba family. In 2006, the Gamba Family Foundation was founded, with the mission of closing the education gap among underserved students. Mary Anne and John, co-founders and directors, work with their children, John Jr., a director, and Beth, the foundation's executive director. Their efforts and investment have had a measurable and long-lasting impact in making quality education accessible in the economically disadvantaged urban communities where they provide support.

In February of this year, Gamba completed a bucket-list item: she established the Mary Anne S. Gamba Endowed Scholarship in honor of Sister Patrice Werner, with a gift of \$100,000. Candidates for the scholarship will be high-achieving, underprivileged students in the nursing program.

In early June, Mary Anne and John enjoyed a full-circle experience when they visited campus for a joyful reunion with Sister Patrice in President Nancy Blattner's office. The Gambas were delighted to hear about all the positive changes that have occurred since the time Mary Anne was a student and to learn more about the vision for Caldwell's future. With hugs all around, it was a meeting of the minds—and the renewal of a wonderful relationship. ■

—Christina Hall

