



Choosing the Life Within: 75 years of Caring for Single Mothers and Their Babies

An informal history of
St. Mary's Infants' Home (1914-1956)
and
Rosalie Hall (1956-1989)

by
Jean Vale

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Digitized: May 2022

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AN INFORMAL HISTORY



ROSALIE
HALL



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and
Rosalie Hall (1956 - 1989)

**The Misericordia Sisters, Rosalie Hall
Scarborough, Ontario**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This informal history of St. Mary's Infants' Home (1914 - 1956) and Rosalie Hall (1956 - 1989) was written by Jean Vale, with helpful assistance from:

Frances Arbour, Francis Arbour, Sr. Françoise Bonenfant, s.m., Sr. Thérèse Bonneville, s.m., Nick Borisko, Sedan Lewis, Paul McAuliffe, Eleanor McBride, Nora Murphy, Irene Allen O'Keefe, Sylvia Ryder, Patricia Sheehan, Helen Slattery, Sr. Armande Tremblay, s.m., Sr. Marguerite Tremblay, s.m., Sr. Aline Vautrin, s.m., Christopher West.

Much valuable information was also obtained from the archives of:

Misericordia Sisters in Montreal, courtesy of Sr. Liliane Theriault, s.m.

Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto, courtesy of Sr. Frieda Watson, C.S.J.

Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Toronto, courtesy of Doreen Cullen.

CHOOSING THE LIFE WITHIN: 1914 - 1989

"I want to tell you something. There's people that have known me all my life who never gave me the love or care that I have received from these people here."

The speaker is Sedan, teenaged single mother of a six-month-old daughter Tiara. "These people" are the Misericordia Sisters and lay staff of Rosalie Hall, a community and residential support centre for single women during and after pregnancy, situated on Lawrence Avenue East in Scarborough, Ontario.

Sedan first came to Rosalie Hall in July 1988, when she was 18. Isolated from her mother since 15, but determined not to abort the child she was carrying, Sedan talked to Sr. Thérèse Bonneville, Rosalie Hall's executive director. At last she found someone who valued her as a unique human person and viewed her expected baby in the same way.

Profile of a resident

Residing at Rosalie Hall during the prenatal months, Sedan was able to take Grade 12 mathematics, biology, and typing taught by qualified teachers supplied by the Scarborough Board of Education and the Metropolitan Separate School Board of Toronto, and coordinated by Sr. Françoise Bonenfant. She also learned some, ceramics, music, and sewing, as well as the needed life skills of budgeting, infant care, and meal-making.

"I just learned so much, I can't begin to tell you," was the way Sedan summed up her Rosalie Hall days. She has now decided to work for a year, leaving Tiara in the daily care of an older woman who lives in the same Metro Housing apartment building. Having filled in as Rosalie Hall's telephone receptionist while she was a resident, she now works as a full-time receptionist.

It would be tempting to say that Sedan is typical of the young girls and women who come to Rosalie Hall, but it would be wrong. For in the 75 years during which the Misericordia Sisters have been serving single pregnant girls and women, none has ever been labelled as "typical." Each client has been perceived to have her own personal gifts and needs, and too often she has been abandoned by her parents and community, as well as by the father of the child she is carrying.

It was the spirit of "compassion of the heart to the most abandoned" (*derelictis misericordia*) that inspired the founding of the Misericordia Sisters in 1848 in Montreal. The order was started by Mme Rosalie Cadron Jetté, a widowed mother of 11 children, at the request of Archbishop Ignace Bourget of Montreal. With seven companions, she undertook the care of unmarried mothers and their children, and by the beginning of the twentieth century, the work of the Misericordia Sisters was well-known, not only in Montreal, but also Ottawa, Winnipeg, Edmonton, New York, Milwaukee, and elsewhere.

Mme Rosalie Cadron Jetté, Montreal 1848

THE BEGINNINGS: BOND STREET (1914 - 1920)

It was quite natural that in 1914, Archbishop Neil McNeil, newly appointed as archbishop of Toronto, would think of the Misericordia Sisters when the Ontario government authorities criticized the lack of suitable maternity and infant care for unmarried Catholic women in the province.

"I think the best way is to induce another order of sisters to come to Toronto and found a new maternity hospital and a new St. Vincent's Home for infants," wrote Archbishop McNeil in a circular letter dated January 20, 1914, which he sent to a number of the city's most prominent Catholics.

The letter pointed out also that the Sisters of St. Joseph, who were struggling to manage their current "infant asylum," needed the quarters for their House of Providence. The archbishop asked for pledged contributions for five years to start a new home and hospital.

"I have found an order ready and willing to undertake the task," reported the archbishop in his usual optimistic tone.

It was, however, with considerable reluctance that the order he was referring to, *les soeurs de Miséricorde*, consented to come to Toronto. Writing to Archbishop McNeil on October 3, 1914, the superior-general Mother St Hilaire stressed: "*Nous ne pouvons rien faire pour cette maison, sauf de donner des soeurs avec leur petit trousseau. Vous nous avez dit qu'elles pouvaient compter sur la générosité des citoyens de Toronto et sur le secours du Gouvernement.*" (We can do nothing for this house except to send some sisters with their small personal belongings. You have told us that they can count on the generosity of the citizens of Toronto and on help from the government.)

*"Les petites
fondatrices de
Toronto"*

Nonetheless, with courage and conviction, on October 20, 1914, Sr. M. du St Coeur de Marie, Sr. St Luc, and Sr. Ste Mathilde, "*les petites fondatrices de Toronto*," as they called themselves, arrived in Toronto from Montreal and took up residence in the former St. Ignatius Academy at 81 Bond Street. Judging the building to be unclean by their standards, they promptly went to the corner grocer and bought two brushes and six cakes of soap, and first gave their new home a good scrubbing. Then they unpacked the six cots, 12 chairs, and two tables which they had ordered from the Robert Simpson Company.

At Archbishop McNeil's request, the sisters renamed the building St. Mary's Infants' Home and converted the former classrooms into a crèche. Soon they were well into their work of "giving prenatal and postnatal care to unmarried Catholic girls and their infants," although the records show that from the start St. Mary's also cared for some girls of other religious affiliations. Statistics from the earliest years are scarce, but a patient list for 1919 shows the names of 72 girls and women, ranging in age from 13 to 29. Exactly half of them gave Toronto as their place of residence.

Under an agreement with the archdiocese, each sister was entitled to a salary of \$250 a year, an unusual arrangement at that time. In addition, the chancery would furnish a sum of \$10,000 toward the building of a hospital, as well as cover any deficit incurred in the meantime.

Promises of financial support notwithstanding, it would appear that money outlays were a constant worry for the Misericordia Sisters of Toronto in the first years. In one letter of October 3, 1915, Sr. M du St Coeur de Marie beseeched Archbishop McNeil to pay the balance of a bill for \$1050, as the nuns could scrape together only \$250.

When the Misericordia Sisters first arrived in Toronto, they could not have been surprised to encounter the bitter prejudices of the time against the young girl or woman who “got in trouble.” The stigma was so great that often the fact of the coming birth of an illegitimate child had to be kept secret, even from the girl’s own parents, perhaps especially from her parents. A letter from a young woman who had given birth to a son at St. Mary’s in 1917 highlights her plight: “Even if I did marry - which is altogether unlikely - I could not marry a man too poor to educate and care for Neil . . .” In order to be accepted by the townsfolk of her Northern Ontario community, she had been obliged to fabricate the story that she was a widow whose husband had died in the 1918 flu epidemic. With great admiration for the good archbishop, she had named her son Albert Neil McNeil. It is not recorded whether anyone ever told Archbishop McNeil of this honour!

Even some members of the clergy, determined to protect the sanctity of marriage at all costs, regarded the unmarried pregnant woman as an outcast. In a 1922 Social Welfare Survey of the Archdiocese of Toronto, which then comprised about 100,000 Catholics, the investigators deplored the common attitude that a child born to an unmarried mother was a matter of great shame. In visiting the pastors of the Niagara Peninsula, for example, one researcher found that all the cases in that area were sent outside Canada to Father Baker’s Home in Lackawanna, New York, and the babies left there. Speaking of individual cases, five pastors had said, “The baby died, thank God.”

Happily, not all Catholics were so narrow-minded. One great supporter of the Misericordia Sisters and St. Mary’s Infants’ Home was Fr. Patrick Bench, the energetic first executive director of Catholic Charities, who worked out of an office at 67 Bond, just down the street from the sisters. It was Fr. Bench who in 1918 encouraged the parish confraternities of Christian Mothers to form a federation, and then persuaded the federation, under the leadership of Mrs. Ambrose Small, to devote its considerable energies to assisting St. Mary’s. By February 1919, Mrs. Small was able to give the sisters a cheque for \$1416 from the Christian Mothers.

Early supporters

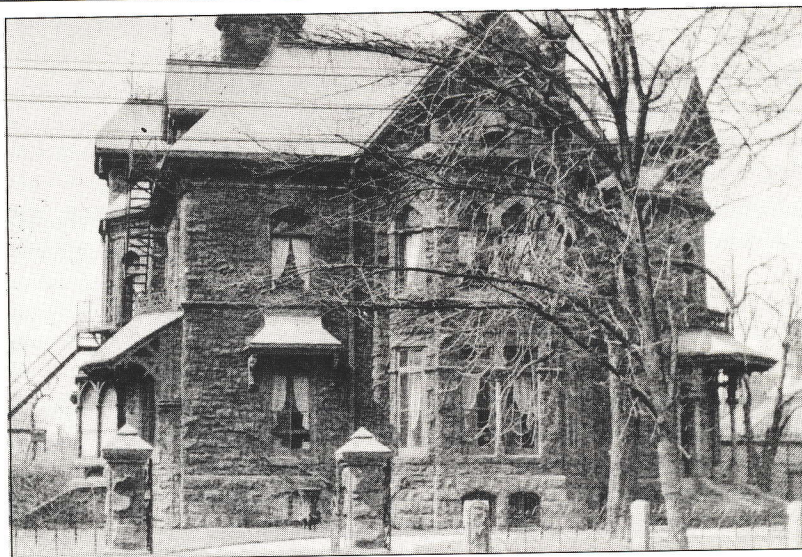
THE MIDDLE DECADES: JARVIS STREET (1920 - 1956)

Following World War I, the numbers of pregnant unmarried girls and abandoned babies increased, and the sisters were compelled to re-locate to larger accommodations. In the spring of 1920, they purchased two magnificent properties at 550 and 556 Jarvis Street, then owned by the Watkins and Somerville families, respectively. They had once belonged to members of the Massey family, in the Victorian era when Jarvis Street was a most fashionable address.

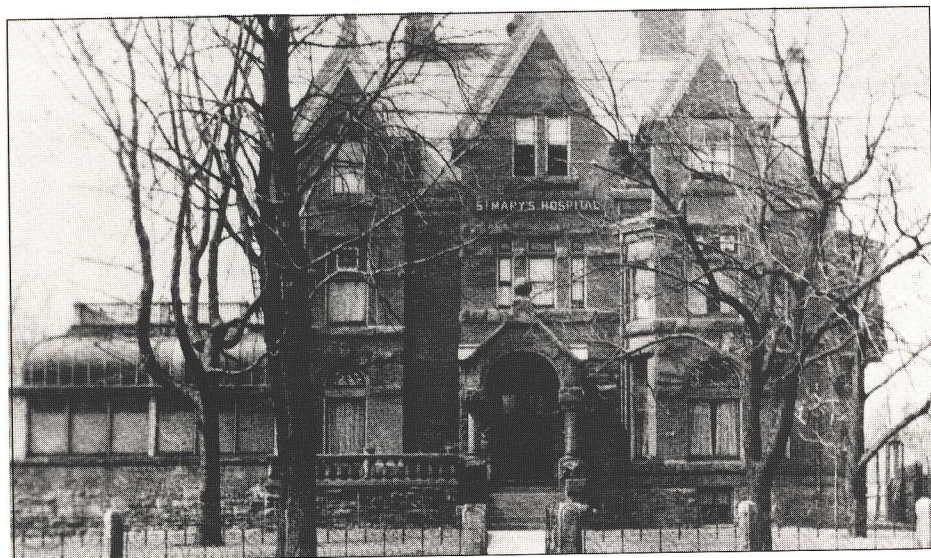
Standing on each property was a commodious red brick residence. The house at the corner of Jarvis and Isabella (no. 550) became St. Mary’s Hospital, and no. 556 to the north was made St. Mary’s Infants’ Home. At the time, the hospital had a nursing staff of nine sisters, with a hospital capacity of 25 beds. The home had room for 50 babies.



Formerly St. Ignatius Academy, this building at 81 Bond Street was the first Toronto location of St. Mary's Infants' Home from 1914 to 1920.



St. Mary's Infants' Home, 556 Jarvis Street, 1920 - 1956.



Located at the corner of Jarvis and Isabella Street, St. Mary's Hospital at first was solely a maternity hospital, but in 1925 began to accept other cases as well.

To help with layettes and other practical needs, the St. Mary's Home Auxiliary was started in 1921 by Mrs. John Devlin of Rose Avenue, Toronto. Paying tribute some 30 years later to both this auxiliary and to the Christian Mothers, Sr. St Elphege wrote in 1941: "Without their valuable help, St. Mary's at one time might not have been able to carry on."

Among other devoted supporters, Sr. St Elphege also had high praise for the doctors, both obstetricians and pediatricians, who saw that their patients at St. Mary's got the best of care, usually with no consideration of a fee. The doctors are too numerous to list, but a special acknowledgement must go to Dr. R. W. Boyden, who continued for many years until he joined the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps at the start of World War II. He was then succeeded by Dr. J. J. Hurley, and since 1956 Dr. P. D. McGarry has served as chief obstetrician and gynecologist.

It should be made clear that, in contrast to the practice of today, in earlier decades any child "born out of wedlock" remained with its mother in a maternity home until such time as it could be adopted or, in rare cases, cared for by the mother herself. Thus, although St. Mary's was called an "infants' home," it had not only infants, but also many toddlers, known formerly as "runabouts." At one count, in January 1925, 12 of the 27 children in the home were more than one year old. If a child was still at St. Mary's at four years of age, it was placed in the Sacred Heart or Carmelite orphanages. Needless to say, it was always a devastating experience for a mother to relinquish her child, no matter what its age, when she had been the caregiver for some time.

At first, the hospital part of St. Mary's was kept strictly for maternity cases, but in 1925, at the urging of several doctors, it was modified to allow for the treatment of medical and surgical ailments as well. It was opened to patients on a paying basis. Private rooms were obtainable for \$6 a day, while a bed in a nine-bed ward could be had for \$3 a day. As an interesting side-note, Mrs. Frances Arbour, a current volunteer assisting the Misericordia Sisters today, gave birth in the 1940's to two of her children in the old St. Mary's Hospital. She chose it because she preferred its homelike warmth and colour to the sterile white of the larger Toronto hospitals.

In the twenties, additional sources of income eased somewhat the financial strain which the sisters had been bearing. Since 1920, a newly formed Federation for Community Services raised funds by an annual campaign, and distributed amounts on a non-denominational basis, according to need. In 1920 St. Mary's Infants' Home received \$11,182.76, which amounted to about 11% of the \$104,000 going to all the Catholic charitable organizations in Toronto at the time. As well, municipal and provincial governments granted St. Mary's about \$3000 a year, and a small board fee was charged to the residents who were able to pay.

In the twenties

Suddenly in 1927, St. Mary's and other Toronto Catholic social services faced a severe financial crisis. The funding from the Federation for Community Services was about to be abruptly cut off when the board of that federation announced in August 1927 that no Catholic charitable organization would receive any sum derived from the forthcoming October campaign. The reason given was that the Catholics of Toronto were contributing only 3% of the total amount raised, but had been asking an annual allotment of 11%. This disproportion was not surprising, since the majority of Catholics in Toronto were at the low end of the socio-economic scale. Some hints by large donors of an ultraprotestant persuasion may have also influenced the decision to reject funding requests from Catholic members of the federation.

In any event, this crisis was faced squarely by Archbishop Neil McNeil, who once more showed his qualities of leadership. With help from leading Catholic lay men and women, he mounted the first Catholic Charities campaign for funds in October 1927. Within four days, the target of \$100,000 had been reached, and St. Mary's Infants' Home was subsequently granted \$11,000 for its annual budget. Later in 1928, it was granted an additional \$1200 on the grounds that more money was needed for food "if the youngsters were to be fed nutritiously."

*"A place of
refuge"*

The actual placing of mothers-to-be and infants in St. Mary's came under the jurisdiction of the Catholic Welfare Bureau. One former staff member of that organization who visited St. Mary's regularly between 1932 and 1942 is Eleanor McBride. She recalls it as having been viewed by all concerned as "a place of refuge" which kept a very low profile. Perhaps symbolic was the fact that everyone entered and left by the back door! Some girls did take jobs as domestics in private homes until the baby was born. Few had any money in those years of the Great Depression, so the Catholic Welfare Bureau and the women's auxiliary regularly supplied maternity clothes to the residents.

The hard times of the thirties also meant budget-cutting for St. Mary's, because now the Catholic Charities collection could not meet its annual goal. Everyone complained of being cold, said Eleanor, because the big old house was so costly to heat. Although the food was adequate for maintaining the health of the mothers and babies, it was very basic and uninteresting.

Under the terms of the Child Welfare Act, the cost of the young mother's confinement and the baby's expenses were charged back to her home municipality. Eleanor has distinct memories of the distress caused by this practice. In a small centre, the village clerk would likely know the girl's family, and she would live in dread that her parents might find out the real reason why she came to Toronto.

"With the exception of the sisters and their supporters, nobody had much regard for those girls," Eleanor remembers sadly. Generally the attitude was that they had committed mortal sin, and their blemished past must be kept hidden. There was no follow-up of mother or child, it being considered wisest to bury the whole episode of pregnancy and illegitimate birth. In recent years, however, adults learning that they were baptized at St. Mary's Infants' Home are asking in increasing numbers for their baptismal certificates. These are now in the care of the Archives, Archdiocese of Toronto.

Taking the 1940 report to Catholic Charities to be typical of the time, St. Mary's Infants' Home stated a total of 87 mothers cared for in the year, with about 23 in residence at any one time. "Generally, the girls come from two to four months before confinement and remain from three to four months after. Frequently, however, mother and child are admitted after confinement has taken place in a hospital or home," the report reads.

World War II

The advent of World War II, tragic as it was in many respects, did alleviate considerably the financial strain besetting Toronto's charitable organizations in the thirties. With plenty of war work available, employment and wages increased, and donors were more generous. As a result, in 1943, when Sr. Ste Solange was superior, St. Mary's Infants' Home was able to receive \$17,000 from Catholic Charities. In the same year, a new United Community Fund was established to replace 18 former



In September 1930, Sr. M. de la Merci, superior, and Sr. St. Hortense are shown with the little "runabouts" just before meal-time.



Sr. St. Hortense and Nurse Holmes watch over the infants in St. Mary's nursery.

individual campaigns. This progressive step greatly benefited all the charitable organizations, including those under Catholic and Jewish auspices. By 1948 St. Mary's Infants' Home was granted \$20,000 from this source, thus covering 82.6% of its expenses. (The remainder came from municipal and provincial authorities.) After undergoing several changes of name and structure, the United Community Fund eventually became United Way, and continued as an important source of funding for St. Mary's for over four decades.

Other improvements were also made in the forties. Sylvia Ryder, with the Catholic Children's Aid from 1943 to 1950, often had the duty of taking babies from St. Mary's to court for a wardship hearing. She remembers how well cared for they were, under the high standards maintained by Leah Camarand, R.N., who was in charge of the nursery. It was a point of special pride to Miss Camarand that the babies were given an adequate daily dose of ascorbic acid, as well as other nutrients.

An improvement along another line was the introduction of knitting and cooking classes by Sr. Marie Madeleine, appointed executive director in 1948. These were the first life-skills classes conducted in the home. A few years later, Sr. Marie Madeleine also arranged for the Victorian Order of Nurses to conduct prenatal classes to assist the young mothers-to-be in becoming good parents.

In 1950 the Ontario Welfare Council made a study of St. Mary's Infants' Home, reporting that 156 girls and women had been cared for in 1949, two-thirds of whom had come in their prenatal period. Most were 18 or 19 years of age, with one 15-year-old among them. They lived on the third floor of the home, in three rooms with six beds each, and one room with five beds. The babies were kept in one large nursery on the second floor with 12 or 15 cribs, or in a second room for four tiny infants.

The report described the daily routine at the home:

The girls get up at seven o'clock and have breakfast. After prayers, the mothers bathe and feed their babies for about an hour, and the pregnant girls are assigned to work - two to the dining-room, two to the living-room, two to the kitchen, etc.....Those assigned to dishwashing are paid \$5 a week.....The girls also must help for three periods each week in the central laundry.

Although free to walk out and visit friends outside, few residents chose to do so, preferring to visit among themselves during the evening. Some might play a little ping-pong or listen to the radio. Those who were new mothers spent as much time as they could with their babies.

The Ontario Welfare Council had special praise for the executive director Sr. Marie Madeleine (Armande Tremblay), a graduate of the University of Montreal's School of Social Work. "She is dynamic, intelligent, and with a fine personality, to whose warmth the girls obviously respond," observed the authors of the report, adding, "She rekindles their feeling of self-respect through her own attitude towards them."

Overall, the report concluded, "this service is of good quality," noting that since the first admission to St. Mary's in 1915, care had been given to 2572 women, and to 3221 babies.

But even as this praise was being expressed, serious trouble for the Misericordia Sisters

Sr. Marie
Madeleine

was looming from another quarter. The imposing old St. Mary's buildings were being criticized by the provincial government as *"trop vieux pour vivre"* (quoting Sr. Ste Roseline who informed the superior-general Mother Madeleine de Pazzi). "Too old to continue living," the hospital was condemned outright in 1951. What to do now? was the question. Depart from Toronto or undertake a new building project?

"Trop vieux pour vivre"

After much prayer and reflection, Mother Madeleine de Pazzi and the general council of the order concluded that it was the voice of God, speaking in 1914 through the late Archbishops McNeil of Toronto and Bruchesi of Montreal, that had first brought the Misericordia Sisters to Toronto. They instructed the Toronto sisters to go out and find enough financing to build a new home for single mothers. At first, there was no thought of trying to build a new hospital also.

Writing about those events nearly 17 years later, Sr. Ste Roseline recorded that quite naturally the first visit made by the sisters was to His Eminence James Cardinal McGuigan, Archbishop of Toronto since 1935.

"Cardinal McGuigan gave us every encouragement, told us we were greatly needed in Toronto to care for the *"filles-mères"* (girl-mothers), and he urged us to stay," stated Sr. Ste Roseline. However, when it came to offering some tangible financial support, His Eminence shook his head and said the contribution of the archdiocese would be *"pas un sou"* (not a penny).

"Go to the city for help," was the advice of Cardinal McGuigan.

But visits to the city fathers and later to provincial authorities likewise brought no results. The request for a capital grant for a home for single pregnant girls and women was rebuffed by one city councillor: "It is an individual matter;" by another: "There is a father who should pay;" and so on.

One friendly provincial official did, however, offer privately some useful advice. "Sisters," he told them, "build a small hospital, say of 150 beds, for which you can easily get a grant. In it you will be able to accommodate your girls until they give birth, and you will have the means to survive in Toronto yourselves."

Consequently, in December 1951, with the approval of the general council, Srs. Ste Roseline and Marie de la Trinité began searching for a site on which to build a new hospital, still thinking of the Jarvis-Isabella area of Toronto.

Enter at this point a most unlikely - yet nonetheless worthy - emissary of the Holy Spirit, in the person of Oliver Crockford, reeve of Scarborough, a rapidly expanding borough lying adjacent to the northeast boundary of Toronto. Well aware that his municipality was in desperate need of a new hospital to keep up with its residential growth, Reeve Crockford appealed persuasively to the Misericordia Sisters to leave the inner city and build their hospital in Scarborough. As a result, on July 18, 1952, after obtaining all the necessary permissions, the sisters purchased 28 acres of land for \$30,000 at the corner of Lawrence Avenue East and McCowan Road. Construction of Scarborough General Hospital began the following spring.

A solution in Scarborough

The story of how the Misericordia Sisters operated the hospital for 16 years, until they turned it over to secular authorities in 1972, must be told in another place. Suffice it to say here that the hospital became a kind of big sister to the much less public 30-bed



Opened in 1956, Rosalie Hall on Lawrence Avenue East, Scarborough, was renovated in 1988-89. This recent photo shows the new entrance to the building.



When Rosalie Hall marked the 70th anniversary of the Misericordia Sisters in Toronto in 1984, four executive directors were on hand to mark the celebrations. Left to right: Sr. Armande Tremblay (1948-59), Sr. Marguerite Tremblay (1959-76), Sr. Huguette Beauchamp (1977-81), and the present executive director, Sr. Thérèse Bonneville, appointed in 1981. In 1976-77 the executive director was Sr. Marcelle Dionne (deceased).

home built just to the west of it at a cost of \$240,000. The new home was given a new name, on the recommendation of Sr. Marie Madeleine. It was now to be known as Rosalie Hall, in honour of Rosalie Cadron Jetté, foundress of the Misericordia Sisters.

On January 30, 1956, during the worst snow storm of the winter, 11 girls and six babies made the move from Jarvis Street to Rosalie Hall. Some of the cars got stuck in the Don Valley, according to Sr. Marie Madeleine. However, eventually everyone arrived safely. "Our family of St. Mary's Home took possession of its new residence," noted Sr. Ste Roseline.

SINCE 1956: LAWRENCE AVENUE EAST IN SCARBOROUGH

From its first day, the new Rosalie Hall kept a homelike yet contemporary decor, with pastel colours, plenty of light from wide casement windows, and cheerful draperies made by the sisters themselves. Budgies and canaries competed in sound with the built-in radio and record player, and flowers and plants could be found everywhere.

In August 1959, Sr. Marie Madeleine (Armande Tremblay) was succeeded as executive director of Rosalie Hall by her sister Sr. Marguerite Tremblay, who remained in this position until 1976. It was during Sr. Marguerite's tenure that the Misericordia Sisters adopted civilian dress and took their birth names for identification.

*Sr. Marguerite
Tremblay*

It was also during the second Tremblay era that remarkable changes occurred in the services offered by Rosalie Hall to the young pregnant single woman. It now became possible for her to enrol in a typing course or sewing class, or to learn a craft such as ceramics. Equally important, in conjunction with the Scarborough Board of Education, Rosalie Hall offered tutoring in academic subjects by qualified secondary school teachers. Anyone who wished to complete her academic year after her baby was born could extend her stay in the home, and take her final examinations right there. The transcript of marks sent back to her hometown high school merely indicated that she had received her grades from the Scarborough Board of Education.

Also under Sr. Marguerite's administration, the first professional social worker Mrs. Margaret Johnson was hired by Rosalie Hall to assist the young mothers-to-be with personal counselling, as well as to help them make practical plans for the future.

Sr. Marguerite has said of her days at Rosalie Hall: "We had our eye on doing a lot more, but our budgeting was so tight that we just couldn't." At the time, the provincial government paid 80% of a resident's per diem cost, which at one point meant as little as \$3.40 a day, although it eventually increased to \$9.00. Most parents paid \$2 to \$3 a day to help with their daughter's upkeep, but nobody was ever refused admission because of inability to pay.

During the 17-year term of Sr. Marguerite Tremblay, Rosalie Hall cared for 2200 girls and women of all religious denominations, with a wide range in age from 12 to 41. Among the significant changes noted by Sr. Marguerite during this period was the higher proportion of young girls coming to Rosalie Hall, and the residents were now much less timid about going out in the community. Many of the fathers were also younger, and more of them wanted to be involved in taking some responsibility, although their offers were not always practical. The babies themselves, however, were

no longer the responsibility of the maternity homes. From 1961 on, the infants were taken directly from the hospital to a foster home 10 days after birth.

To upgrade the status of maternity homes and press for greater government support, Sr. Marguerite Tremblay was a leader in organizing the Maternity Home Association of Ontario, and was elected its first president. Her work increased the public's awareness of the service of the Misericordia Sisters in caring for single pregnant women, without regard to the religious affiliation of the clients.

*Sr. Marcelle
Dionne*

When Sr. Marguerite's term at Rosalie Hall ended in April 1975, she was succeeded by Sr. Marcelle Dionne, who had her master's degree in social service from the University of Wisconsin (Milwaukee). Sr. Marcelle had been director of Sundale Manor for single pregnant women in Chatham, Ontario, until it closed in 1976. Tragically, her term at Rosalie Hall was brought to an untimely end by her death in December 1977. During her brief presence there, her colleagues spoke of her as an "excellent professional, a sensitive woman, warm-hearted with the young, and a religious who was whole-heartedly dedicated to God."

For the last few months of Sr. Marcelle's tenure, Sr. Rosemarie Fisher was appointed interim acting director to relieve Sr. Marcelle of her most onerous duties.

*Withdrawal from
United Way 1976*

The mid-seventies also brought distress of another sort to Rosalie Hall. Although it had been supported by United Way for over 30 years, like other member agencies of Catholic Charities, it felt obliged in conscience to withdraw from that body in 1976 when United Way voted to admit the Planned Parenthood Association, which expressly counselled abortion as one of the valid choices of the pregnant woman. Rallying around Archbishop Philip Pocock, Rosalie Hall endorsed his "Declaration on Behalf of Life," as did all the other Catholic agencies. The Misericordia Sisters were in full agreement with the sentiments expressed by Fr. Paul Lennon, then executive director of Catholic Charities: "The whole purpose of our professional existence was to protect and nurture our clients, so how could we associate with those who were willing to eliminate one of the clients, namely the unborn child?"

Certainly the loss of United Way funding was a blow, but it was soon compensated by equally good support from the newly founded ShareLife, which since 1976 has funded the member agencies of Catholic Charities. Through this funding in the later seventies, Rosalie Hall was able to embark on some new outreach programs. These programs have been a special interest of Paul McAuliffe, who joined the Rosalie Hall board in 1979 and was its chairman from 1981 to 1987. As a supervisor with the Scarborough branch of Catholic Children's Aid Society, Paul was aware of the increasing number of "young moms" who were keeping their babies but too often lacked the parenting and other life skills to make a go of it.

*Sr. Huguette
Beauchamp*

Recalling the first tentative steps toward outreach, Paul McAuliffe has fond memories of the open responsive attitude of Sr. Huguette Beauchamp, who served as executive director of Rosalie Hall from 1977 to 1981. She and her successor Sr. Thérèse Bonneville both observed that the age of the mothers was decreasing, averaging about 17, yet the young women's determination to keep their babies themselves was increasing. The only solution seemed to be to accept the new realities, and work to see that young single mothers got the necessary skills and support to manage. Taking a new direction, Rosalie Hall began to develop follow-up programs to support the young moms.

THE EIGHTIES: INNOVATIONS AND RENOVATIONS

Out of this new thinking began Rosalie Hall's first postnatal mother and child program in December 1981. Its purpose was to teach both the mother and her child new skills by arranging a day-care type of experience for the children, and by providing the mothers with group therapy and classes in child-rearing practices. This program has persevered, and a group meets each Tuesday afternoon. Rosalie Hall provides either van transportation or TTC tickets for group members.

*New educational
and other
programs*

Other support programs have been run as needed in the last eight years: for parents, for the young women who have given up their babies for adoption, for fathers. In 1989 for the first time, the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services funded 100% of the approved programs, thus allowing the use of the Catholic Charities funding for new programs.

Another innovation of the 1980's is evident in the schooling of the young clients. Since 1980, the opportunity to attend academic classes at Rosalie Hall was offered to day students who were pregnant but who lived at home or elsewhere in the community, and came to school each day. In the early part of the eighties, both day and resident students had to rely on private tutoring from 14 qualified teachers who came to Rosalie Hall after 3 p.m. daily. Since 1985-6, however, the Scarborough Board of Education has provided three full-time teachers, and two more teachers were added by the Metropolitan Separate School Board of Toronto in 1987-88. They cover all subjects in the curriculum from Grades 9 to 12, and in the academic year 1988-89 gave instruction to 60 day students and 36 residents. Since 1986, the Metropolitan Separate School Board has also provided a part-time teacher for Grade 8 students. In 1989 the classroom area of Rosalie Hall was still active in July and early August when, for the first time, there was an academic summer school, with an enrolment of 15.

The coordination of the education program is the responsibility of Sr. Françoise Bonenfant, who also is identified with Rosalie Hall's highly successful crafts program. Sr. Françoise began to teach crafts soon after her arrival in 1976, and has never looked back since. Residents of today and yesterday, as well as day students, learn to create high-quality ceramic pieces which are then fired in one of three kilns. Assisted by Sr. Thérèse Audet, a full-time volunteer, and other staff members, Sr. Françoise also teaches copper enamelling, macrame work, and dollmaking. For the past ten years, the annual art and craft sale on the first Sunday of November has been a highlight of Rosalie Hall's year. The 1988 show netted \$8,000 for the building fund.

Of course, Sr. Françoise's main purpose in teaching crafts is not to make a profit, but to assist the young mothers-to-be to express their creativity. "It has proved a great therapy for our young women," is her observation, based on 15 years of experience. "They feel joy and pride when they see their handicrafts being considered worthy of purchase."

"*Trop vieux pour vivre*" (too old to live). This was the criticism that had led to the move from Jarvis Street to Scarborough in 1956. Now it was being heard again to give the Misericordia Sisters and Rosalie Hall's board a jolt. But this time it was the furnace that was being condemned as too old to continue! However, replacing the furnace in a building that was no longer able to meet the demands of the new programs did not make good sense. So the sisters and the board once more took a courageous step. This time they decided to build a new building to the north of the original one, and to

*Miracle of the
"failing furnace"*



THEN AND NOW

At St Mary's Infants' Home in the 1920's, babies and children get all dressed up to pose for the camera in the play-yard.

In December 1988, Christine, Ashley and Sean are busy with their own activities in the day-care playroom of Rosalie Hall. Pants have replaced the dresses and fancy togs of yore, but note that the good old pleasure of putting whatever is in your hands into your mouth is the same today as it was 60 years ago!



completely renovate the 1956 edifice. In the words of Paul McAuliffe, who chaired the board during the construction period, the result should be called "the miracle of the failing furnace."

"I used to have my doubts about miracles," said Paul, "but since working for two years on this building project with Sr. Thérèse, I have now come to depend on them."

In Phase I of the project, the new building was opened in March 1988. It contains three townhouses, each designed to accommodate 10 single pregnant women. Under the guidance of a youth worker, they plan their menus, go grocery shopping, and prepare the meals. They also have a say in the way they want their house to be run.

In Phase II, the renovated building was redesigned to allow proper full-time classrooms and more room for crafts. The day-care space for the babies of the day students was enhanced to allow for a fully licensed day-care program instead of the former baby-sitting service. Rosalie Hall Infant/Toddler Centre was licensed to operate in January 1989, providing 25 spaces for an age range from two weeks to 30 months. It is presently staffed by eight teachers, of whom seven have diplomas in early childhood education.

With its facilities thus enlarged, Rosalie Hall is now able to keep better contact with its alumnae. A monthly supper club has been started for young women who graduated from the day-student program of the previous academic year. The mothers prepare a meal together for themselves and their children, then have a discussion on some topic of common interest while volunteers babysit.

Board member Tony Silva and his building committee feel justly satisfied when, after months of hard work, they view the many services running smoothly in the new and upgraded quarters of Rosalie Hall. They and everyone else involved in the centre are grateful to the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services who listened receptively to the new ideas for reaching out to single mothers and mothers-to-be, whether living in the community or residing at Rosalie Hall itself. The Ministers Frank Drea and later John Sweeney, as well as the Ministry's representative Gwen Davenport, played a decisive role in advancing the new directions and in getting the necessary funding for them.

*Provincial
government
support*

The total cost of the "miracle of the failing furnace" came to \$3.7 million, of which the provincial government granted close to \$2 million. The Misericordia Sisters contributed \$530,000. The Archdiocese of Toronto and its parishes, Cardinal Carter, and various Catholic and other community organizations have contributed a total of almost \$700,000.

*Generosity of
donors and
fundraisers*

The success of the fundraising campaign, the first in Rosalie Hall's history, is due to the dedication of the hard-working volunteers who continue to serve on the campaign committee, under the chairmanship of past board member Yvonne Kirby. One example is Nick Borisko, who spearheaded the campaign to parishes and services clubs. Nick first became a friend of the Misericordia Sisters when he was chairman of the board of Scarborough General Hospital. What is equally relevant is that he is the father of two adopted children, now grown up. Nick explains that his work for Rosalie Hall is his way of saying thanks to the two unknown mothers who gave birth to his children. He especially enjoys working together with Sr. Thérèse Bonneville. "I tell her it's because we both come from Saskatchewan," Nick jokes.

Although Rosalie Hall now has a paid staff of 42, none of its achievements would be possible without the ongoing support of the volunteers who give their most precious possession - their time. Under the direction of Sr. Aline Vautrin, a stream of 217 volunteers served over 11,000 hours this year, thus making Rosalie Hall a truly community-supported centre.

"If you are going to describe the work of the volunteers, you should talk to Nora Murphy," was the advice given. It was easy to reach Nora, because she comes to Rosalie Hall about four times a week to do whatever is needed. A retired nurse formerly in charge of the emergency department at Scarborough General Hospital, Nora consented to be interviewed only if she could carry on assisting Sr. Aline sort medical records while she talked.

"I think I became a full-time volunteer when Sr. Thérèse came in 1981," Nora said.

"But didn't you help in the nursery before then?" asked Sr. Aline

"Oh, I can't remember when I started. I feel like one of the family," replied Nora in her soft Irish brogue.

In fact, Sr. Aline reported later, Nora had first come in 1977, and has helped at every craft sale since. She also has done in-service training of the staff in cardiac pulmonary resuscitation and other emergency procedures.

It is fitting then that Nora's loyal support was recognized in June 1989 when she was named Rosalie Hall's Volunteer of the Year.

Nor are women the only volunteers today. Frank Arbour began by offering his help to Sr. Huguette Beauchamp in 1977 and found himself taking Mabel the cook to the supermarket for the weekly grocery shopping. Then when Mabel went on vacation, Frank "volunteered" his wife Frances to come and do the cooking!

Volunteers of a different sort are the Prayer Friends which grew to 150 this year, involving nine Scarborough parishes and one parish in Sudbury. Each prayer friend adopts a single pregnant young woman or a young mom and makes a commitment to pray for her daily over a period of four years. It is noteworthy that the prayer friend never meets the young woman, but is given only her first name and initial of the last name, plus two prayer intentions. The friend receives a progress report every two months. As Sr. Thérèse observes, "It takes much generosity to pray for someone you will never meet."

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The coming celebration of three-quarters of a century in Toronto brings rejoicing to both the Misericordia Sisters and all others connected in any way to Rosalie Hall. At the same time, it raises the question - what lies ahead for this community and residential centre in the last decade of this century and beyond?

Chairman of the board of governors of Rosalie Hall, Chris West was asked to give his view of the future. He sees the focus on giving short-term residential accommodation



There is a special art to cuddling a baby, as Maureen, a young student at Rosalie Hall, demonstrated in 1988 with her son Sean.

But the mothers are not the only ones with the knack. Here Cardinal Emmett Carter shows his skill with a little one when he visited Rosalie Hall in 1986. (Chris McKie)



to young mothers with their babies because affordable housing is now so difficult to find. Thus, in a way, there will be a return to the concept that existed in the early days of St. Mary's Infants' Home which accommodated both mothers and babies. The significant difference, however, is that today's young mother will not later suffer the heartbreak of seeing her child taken away from her for adoption or placement in an orphanage.

Chris also referred to the blueprint for establishing more formal links and services between Rosalie Hall and the secondary schools of Scarborough, for the purposes of counselling and education concerning the special situation of the teenager who is single, pregnant, and too often all alone.

With the increased number of divorced, separated, and other single parents in today's society, Rosalie Hall's clients and caregivers have seen the attitude toward the single pregnant woman soften somewhat in recent years. Gone fortunately is the morally superior indignation expressed by a parent who once scolded Sr. Marguerite Tremblay because a group of the residents were laughing and making jokes within earshot. "They should be on their knees, weeping in repentance," she admonished Rosalie Hall's executive director.

Courage of the clients

Nonetheless, there is still prejudice out there, as the young women themselves will affirm. Some people still take the view that pregnancy in the single state is a woman's sole responsibility, and she should be left to solve her problem herself. But while no one in good conscience would advocate that a girl or woman without a spouse should become pregnant, surely she who does so and allows her baby its right to life should be commended for choosing the more noble path. She is worthy of society's support. Like all mothers, she joins with God in a mysterious way to co-create a new human person who is both unique and precious.

In this era of the quick fix, the young mothers-to-be and single moms at Rosalie Hall have expressed a resounding NO THANKS to an easily accessible abortion. They themselves have best described their feelings in a statement composed by 12 residents in 1983:

We choose life, though this is a difficult decision to make. Our average age is 17, and some of us have no support from family, friends, or father. Some of us could not have an abortion, and others chose not to, but today all of us are glad we did not. We are at peace that we made the decision to choose life.

Each of the 12 young women signed her name to this statement.

Greater lay involvement

If the changes in society have deeply affected the clients served by Rosalie Hall, they have also had a major impact on the Misericordia Sisters themselves and their future. Like most religious communities in Canada, the order has suffered a severe decline in vocations, and its median age rises yearly. With that trend in mind, the sisters and the Rosalie Hall board have lately appointed lay people to several administrative posts at Rosalie Hall, including the director of programs and services, and the director of administrative services.

Although fewer are now attracted to the religious life than formerly, more lay people are now responding to the call to associate themselves with the Misericordia Sisters in their prayer life. A recently formed group known as the Friends of Mercy holds

regular workshops and retreats, and some make a yearly promise as a form of commitment. While this commitment in no way obliges anyone to do volunteer or paid work for Rosalie Hall, it is possible that in time some of the Friends of Mercy will take on direct responsibilities.

Underpinning the entire 75 years of caring for single pregnant women and their babies has been the deep religious faith of the Misericordia Sisters. It has implicitly motivated every step of their way since "*les petites fondatrices*" first arrived in Toronto in October 1914. As Sr. Armande Tremblay asserts, "You don't get very far without God." The sisters' dedication to God has been nourished over the years by a succession of spiritual directors, too lengthy to record in this brief history. Special mention should be made, however, of the abiding friendship shown to Rosalie Hall over many years by Fr. John Moss, who was always available to both the young women and the sisters, fulfilling a wide range of their spiritual needs.

With its spiritual foundation strong, Rosalie Hall faces the final decade of the twentieth century with great anticipation, under the dynamic leadership of Sr. Thérèse Bonneville.

"Sr. Thérèse always knows how to find what is needed," is the evaluation expressed by one of her fellow executive directors in the field of Catholic Charities.

"I wish the above statement were true," is Sr. Thérèse's reply. "If it were, we would not have a half-million dollar debt hanging over our heads following this latest expansion and renovation project. But we bravely went ahead with it, confident that once again we would come out all right if it was God's will.

"We really wanted to offer the best of services under the best of conditions to young single mothers and their children. And we wanted to adapt to the changing needs.

"We firmly believe in the special mandate and mission we received from the Church in 1848 'to serve the single mother in crisis during and after pregnancy, and to serve her child.' Also, we truly believe in the dignity of life."

*Trust plus love
equals
Rosalie Hall*

Sr. Thérèse's message sums up succinctly the whole evolution of the progress of Rosalie Hall from its first years as St. Mary's Infants' Home on Bond Street to its new directions into the 1990's and even into the twenty-first century.

Important as Sr. Thérèse's statement is, however, it is still the young women themselves and their babies who today, as in 1914, are at the heart's core of Rosalie Hall. Appropriately then, Sedan, the single mother whose remarks introduced this informal history, should also have the last word:

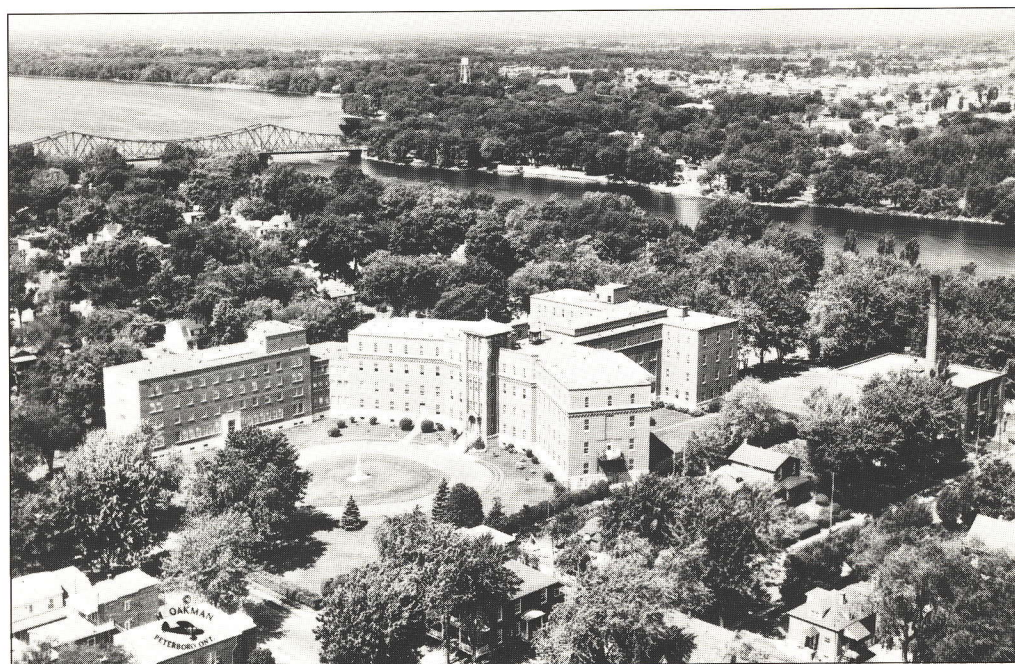
"I would recommend Rosalie Hall to any single person who finds herself pregnant. Here you are not 'alone and pregnant,' but you are part of a loving and caring family. I love you all, I'll never forget you. Keep Tiara and me in your prayers. We'll be back to visit. God bless."



Mother de la Nativité
(Marie-Rosalie Cadron Jetté)
Foundress of the Misericordia Sisters
(1794-1864)



Sr. du St Coeur de Marie
First superior of St. Mary's Infants' Home



Motherhouse of the Misericordia Sisters,
Montreal, Quebec

**SUPERIORS AND ADMINISTRATORS OF
ST. MARY'S INFANTS' HOME (1914 - 1956) AND ROSALIE HALL (1956 - 1989)**

1914	Sr. du St Coeur de Marie, s.m.
1918	Sr. Ste Eudoxie, s.m.
1928	Sr. Marie de la Merci, s.m.
1931	Sr. St Georges, s.m.
1937	Mother Ste Béatrice, s.m.
1940	Sr. Ste Solange, s.m.
1943	Sr. St Rémi, s.m.
1944	Sr. Marie de l'Ange Gardien, s.m.
1948	Sr. Marie Madeleine (Armande Tremblay), s.m.
1959	Sr. Marguerite Tremblay, s.m.
1976	Sr. Marcelle Dionne, s.m.
1977	Sr. Huguette Beauchamp, s.m.
1981	Sr. Thérèse Bonneville, s.m.



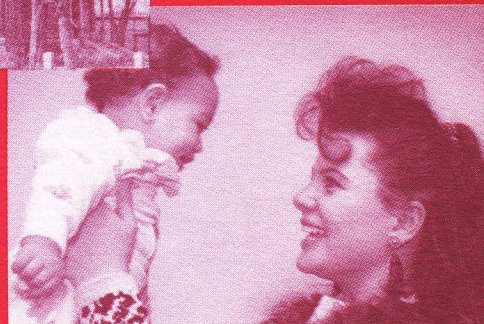
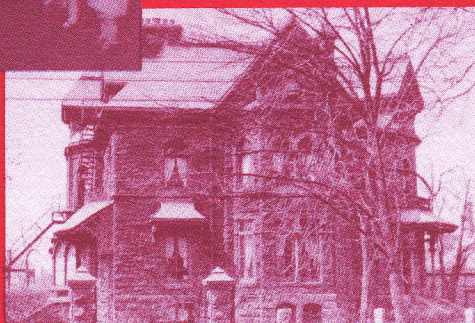
This crest expresses in a symbolic way
the works of the
Misericordia Sisters of Montreal

The three roses denote the LOVE and COMPASSION which characterizes the works of the Misericordia Sisters. The left side of the crest is of azure colour, symbolizing Nobility. The letter "M", enriched in gold, speaks of the maternal protection of Mary; "M" is also the initial letter of the name of the order. The right side of the crest, silver in colour with a broken reed, represents all who come for help and guidance in times of crisis. Oak branches are the emblem of the courage and strength of a Christian.

Derelictis Misericordia means
COMPASSION OF THE HEART FOR THOSE IN NEED
and this is the sisters' motto.

ROSALIE HALL AND

ST. MARY'S INFANTS' HOME
1914 - 1989



CARING FOR SINGLE MOTHERS