

How Johnny Was Changed

Jaime Escalante became a well-known man after the movie *Stand and Deliver*.

This cinematized biography told the story of his creative and passionate teaching career in the barrio of East Los Angeles. One of his most memorable teaching experiences, however, never made it into the script of this popular movie.

At the beginning of a school year, Escalante was stopped by a parent after a PTA meeting. The woman asked how her son, Johnny, was getting along in the classroom. The brilliant teacher thought she was the mother of another boy named Johnny. One Johnny was an excellent and compliant student; the other spent most of his time goofing off and disrupting the class.

Assuming that her son was the better student, Escalante said, "I can't tell you how much I enjoy your son. I'm so glad he's in my class."

The next day, the problem child approached Escalante and said, "My mom told me what you said about me last night. I haven't ever had a teacher who wanted me in his class."

The boy made a complete turnaround. Within a few weeks, he was one of Escalante's hardest-working students and a true joy to teach.

There are many people who are much like that Johnny. We see them in residents who come to us with advancing age or physical and emotional challenges who believe life has dealt them a hard hand to play. Or maybe there is a Johnny or two on the staff, perhaps new on the job and seeking to find their way or beset by personal or family problems.

In either case, their frustrating behavior could be changed by the knowledge that somebody cares, that somebody wants them around.

Encouragement, as Johnny showed, can go a long way.

The Apostle Paul said it: *Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing* (1 Thessalonians 5:11 ESV).

– Beecher Hunter