



## MERCY CENTER

### *A Profile in Mercy: Rita Kern*



For the last 16 years, Rita Kern has led the “Express Yourself” creative writing class each week for the 7th and 8th grades at Sisters Academy. She named it this because the class is for the “pure enjoyment” of poetry interpretation and writing. The girls are not required to share, but most of the time they like to, and are not graded on their writing. However, they are inspired by Rita and their classmates to write poems about feelings, colors, and the environment. They are also challenged to answer “who am I.” Rita reviews each poem and makes suggestions or minor edits for improvement.

Each year, the girls continue to “floor” her with their creativity, expression, willingness to learn and share their poems. They take advantage of the class being a safe space. Even though no work is criticized, Rita is “amazed” with the writing. Last week, the 7<sup>th</sup> grade shared poems on pride.

Rita knows good work when she reads it. For many years she worked in Education in different roles such as a Sunday School Teacher, member of Case Assessment Resource Team, and a Tutor with the Monmouth County Education System.

Throughout the course, the students collate all their poems in folders. At the end of the semester, they design a booklet of all their poems using ribbons and colors. They then keep the booklets as a memento of the class and reflection of their poetry.

In addition to teaching this writing class, Rita enjoys spending time with her husband, daughters and five grandchildren. She often heads into New York for shows and visits to museums. Just about every day, she walks to the beach for some quiet time on the bench.

Her experience at Sisters Academy has “enriched” her life. To learn about our volunteer opportunities at Mercy Center, please call (732) 774-9397 ext. 121. Rita can attest that you “get back much more than you give.”

Rita has graciously shared a poem from a former 7<sup>th</sup> grade student:

Who am I?

I am the last leaf on the tree in winter, never letting go of my dreams.

I am the smooth, calm never-ending river that never stops believing.

I am a tough rock whose spirit is never broken.

I am a star way up high brighter than any other.

I am the autumn wind, always quick to make a move.

I am a cherry blossom just beginning to grow.

This is who I am. Who are you?