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Questions and Answers – David and Karen as Jane and Tim

David: Karen, I understand we're going to meet a mother and a child. What would you like the mother's name to be?

Karen: Jane.

David: Jane.
And how old is Jane approximately?

Karen: Oh, 35.

David: 35. And you're also going to play the role of Jane's son or daughter?

Karen: Yes.

David: Who is it?

Karen: Her son, yes. And his name is Tim.

David: Tim. And how old is Tim?

Karen: 10.

David: And Karen, what were the circumstances under which you met Jane and Tim, and they met you? Where did that happen?

Karen: Jane came to my service because Tim had just moved back in with her. Yes.

David: Where had he been?

Karen: Tim had been in the care of CYFS (Child, Youth and Family Services), then went to live with Jane's brother and his wife, and then they returned him to Jane because they couldn't handle his behavior.

David: So he lived with the mother until...

Karen: Jane's brother and...

David: Sister-in-law?

Karen: Yes. And then they gave him back.

David: That's a pretty strong word, isn't it? That means they gave up. That's what "gave him back" means.

Karen: Yes.

David: They gave Tim back to Jane.

Karen: Yes.

David: And was Jane prepared for this or...?

Karen: No.

David: She wasn't prepared. Was it sudden?

Karen: She wasn't prepared.

David: And how long had Tim been in CYFS care?

Karen: Since he was two years old, and then he lived with his uncle from the age of eight.

David: Okay, so from two to eight with CYFS. And from nine to ten with the uncle.

Karen: Yes.

David: And quickly, just to clarify, it's really unusual for CYFS to remove a child from their mother at two years old. How should we understand that?

Karen: Because there was violence in the parental relationship and neglect in the parent-child relationship. And two of the four children died due to neglect in one way or another. Yes.

David: They died?

Karen: Yes, they died.

David: Wow. Okay, this is not something common. So there were three children and one survived?

Karen: Yes, and the surviving sister is still living with the uncle.

David: Okay. They're here.

Karen: Yes.

David: And where are you working? This is quite a challenging case for a practitioner.

Karen: Yes.

David: It's a credit to you.

Karen: Thank you.

David: Good. Where are you working?

Karen: I work at Rostrevor House, which is in Hamilton...

David: Oh, from Hamilton, yes.

Karen: I work from Hamilton. Yes. And I work in an ICAMHS group of agencies.

David: ICAMHS.

Karen: Yes. Infant, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

David: Good.

Karen: And yes.

David: It's very interesting that you were assigned this case as a practitioner.

Karen: I also work there, so yes, that's...

David: Okay. And when was Tim returned to his mother?

Karen: About two and a half years ago.

David: Oh, okay. Oh, right. Oh no. Wait.

Karen: Yes, that's right.

Karen: He's growing up, yes.

David: No, but I thought he was nine and ten at the uncle's house.

Karen: Maybe he was nine and a half with the uncle, and probably ten with the mother.

David: I thought he was ten.

Karen: Yes, but I'm rounding up or down.

David: Okay. So I'm not worried about the details—let's say two years ago,

Karen: Yes, roughly,

David: roughly.

Karen: Yes.

David: And that must have been an incredible challenge for both parties.

Karen: Yes.

David: Good. From your point of view, how are they doing?

Karen: Good. Yes.

David: Now, everyone would be really surprised by what you just said, given that there was a loss of certain... Well, I suppose no one went to jail for this, right?

Karen: Not for the death of the children, no.

David: But they were involved in that in one way or another.

Karen: Yes.

David: And why do you think, in your opinion, knowing Tim and Jane and this very conflicted situation, since they had already “given him up,” why did she accept him and he accept her? Why do you think that happened?

Karen: I think because she was also given an opportunity. A decision outside the legal system. So he was simply returned to her.

David: So I suppose that only happens when everyone else gives up, saying—when you take a child from someone for eight years and then give him back.

Karen: Yes.

David: That’s not common.

Karen: No.

David: Okay. From your perspective, was it just desperation on CYFS’s part, or did they see something in Jane that made them think maybe it was the best of a bad situation?

Karen: Yes, I think that was part of it. It was also because the uncle had legal custody or guardianship of the child, so CYFS closed the case, it was no longer their business.

David: Oh, he could...

Karen: He could do whatever he wanted, whatever he thought was appropriate.

David: If CYFS had remained in control, do you think they would have allowed this?

Karen: They've been involved through... I can't think of the word... associated response, differential response. They've been involved since he returned to his mother through an associated response to monitor the child's care.

Karen: Okay.

David: So they're keeping an eye on things.

Karen: Watching, but they've closed the case again. Yes.

David: So he's been discharged from CYFS again. Yes. Well, there are some notable things here. What's notable? What did you just hear when you have to listen against the story? What did you just hear?

Observer: (speaking quietly) Yes, I don't know. The objectification of the child, and—

David: Well, that's what happened, you know? They gave up their supervision. For a mother who was involved in the death of two children. Do you think a government department gives up the care, the supervision of a child in a home where they didn't really have the authority over guardianship? They'd be very worried about that. They gave up their supervision. They don't do that without a reason. Okay? That's the point where the... The interview is going to begin here.

Questions & Responses

1. Jane, I admit to being really intrigued why you think CYFs (Child, Youth, and Family) has relinquished their surveillance of your mothering of Tim given all that's gone on for the first 10. or so years of his life. Why do you think they are trusting you to be Tim's loving mother?

Jane: I think because I am not in a relationship. I am single and I have stayed out of trouble since all my children left me. I have lived in one area since then. And as soon as I got him, I reached out for help.

2. The fact that you 'kept out of trouble', 'lived in a new place', 'stayed single', did that have to do with your mother love and mother craft?

Jane: I think for me it's been just trying to get on with my life. (nodding to herself). Yah!

3. Did you have any idea that beyond 'getting on with your life, you might also have been making a home for Tim to return to?

Jane: (It would have been nice to daydream about having both kids back but I never saw it coming (nodding to herself) Yah, I never saw it coming. And the fact that they didn't give my daughter back, that is more about what they wanted rather than what Tim needed.

4. Over all these years, did your mother's heart cry out for your lost children?

Jane: (nodding vigorously)Yah! Yah!

5. Would anyone have been aware that your mother's heart was crying out for your kids?

Jane: I don't think so because the people that are around me are people that are just surviving as well.

6. Do you remember when you were notified that your brother had surrendered Tim and, in fact, he intended to return him to your mother care?

Jane:I got a phone call at night to say he was coming the next day. It was eight o'clock at night.

7. Do you remember what day of the week that was?

Jane: It was a Wednesday.

8. Do you remember what you were doing?

Jane: I just came in from cleaning up the cow shed. Mmh..Mmh.

9. When you woke up that day, am I right to think that you thought that day would be like any other day?

Jane:(nodding vigorously) Yah..Yah!

10. When you realized in the gist of the conversation that a dream that you hadn't dared to dream was going to come true, were you struck dumb? Or could you not believe your ears? Or did you think you were hallucinating?

Jane: I remember being struck with panic because I know how he behaves and how he 'weirds' people out. And I just thought if they can't cope with him and no one else can cope with him, how am I going to cope with him?

11. That night when this panic must have still been going on in you, did you have a dream or a nightmare about what might be lying ahead of you?

Jane: I remember being awake a lot of the night...yah I don't remember dreaming.

12. Could you not even sleep?

Jane: Not very much...no!

13. What thoughts were going through your mind that entire time?

Jane: I was really worried because the house I was living in was freezing. The middle of nowhere and freezing. And it was winter. And I don't have much furniture. I have a broken sofa and one chair. I have one bed. I just have nothing! Right! And how am I going to make a home for him?

14. If your mother's heart could have spoken at that particular time, what might it have been saying to you in that nearly impossible time?

Jane: I am not fit for him to come and live with me.

15. Did anything that night speak back to you about being an unfit mother?

Jane: Remembering Tim's early life and what happened to the other children. Not knowing how to do it. I never raised the other children. I don't know how to do it. I am going to get back a naughty, naughty boy who does disgusting things. How am I going to look after him?

16. Did anything along the way reassure you or give you some sort of hope? Why I'm asking this is that it would have been justifiable for you to ring up CYFs and say I want to surrender too!

Jane: Just because there was nowhere else for him ...there is just nowhere else. If there was, he would have been planted there and grown there. And he hasn't...he has moved and moved and moved.

17. Do you remember the first time you saw each other and looked upon him once again as his mother?

Jane: Do you mean after he came to live with me? I think it was about 18. months after he came to live with me. And I don't really know how it happened but life has settled...life has really settled down. He can still be...

18. Is it a mystery to you?

Jane:Yah, it is still a mystery...it is a mystery!

19. Is it a mystery for you and me to do our damndest to solve ?

Jane: (nodding vigorously) Yah I thought he would live with me for two weeks and then he would run away and they(CYFS) would take him again.

Crocodile?

Joel: I don't know I am just guessing.

20. Let me tell you what's in it for me. In my field of child protection, the odds of you doing what you've done would have been estimated at one in a thousand. Would you agree? What would your estimation of the odds for you redeeming yourself as his mother have been?

Jane: (nodding negatively)

21. You know when you went to bed a few weeks later, did you think he and you would have lasted another 2. weeks?

Jane: I never spent any day thinking this was the beginning of the rest of my life. I always thought this was the beginning of the end. It was so hard and he was so unhappy.

22. If I met a mother who was in your shoes and was up against the same odds you were and she was thinking, 'I won't last two weeks as my son's mother', what advice might you have given her if she had sought you out?

Jane:I would say, 'Reach out and get help'. I would say, 'Start talking to people'. I would say, 'Pick a school and stick with it'. Don't move around schools'. It took me a year to learn that. And I would say, 'Be open to the help'.

23. I'm not denying any of what you're saying, but there is one thing we haven't talked about and that is a mother's wisdom. Would you say that you've developed some mother's wisdom in the last 18. months?

Jane: I think now it took me that long to get to know him and to get to know how bad bad is. And then when you are at bad, it doesn't seem to get any worse than this. Bad is as bad is. And learning to trust when it is bad, it can only get better.

24. Oh hold on ... a lot of people would believe that it gets worse. Why do you think you have developed this philosophy that 'when it gets bad, it only gets better'?

Jane: Because of all the people I had around me who kept saying, 'Hold on..wait on. And we're looking how it could get better as well'. I don't think it was me; sometimes it was.

25. Why do you think they trusted you with his care, knowing this would be the greatest challenge that any mother could have? What do they know about you to know you wouldn't give up and surrender?

Jane:I think because I was willing to take him...willing to ask for help...I'm sorry I have forgotten the question.

26. Let me ask you a different way then, I apologize. I probably got messed up myself. I know that people gave you help but they couldn't be his mother. Only you could be his mother!

Jane: Yah

How did you translate their help into your mother craft and mother love? How did you translate it because they weren't there when the going got tough?

Jane:No, they weren't. I think for a long time I was relying on other people like my family members to help me out when it was really difficult. I think I saw the little bits of him that were loving and sweet. And there started to be some of those times, enough of those times that made me feel like loving him. (nodding head vigorously)

27. Can I talk to you, Tim?

Tim: Yes

28. Tim, your mum just told me that somewhere along the line she saw that you could be 'loving' and 'sweet'. Do you know what she's talking about there?

Tim: She's talking about when I am being good and doing what I've been told. And I am not rude to her because I swear at her a lot.

29. I know you're only 10.. So this may be a really, really hard question. Tell me if it is and I'll ask you an easier one! Why did you decide to do what your mother told you and not swear at her so often?

Tim: Well, sometimes she's not that bad and sometimes I'm...sometimes it feels nice to be good.

30. What! Am I hearing things?

Tim: (amused)

31. Jane did you hear what Tim said- "It's nice to be good?"

Tim: (Mmh..mmh)

32. Tim, before did you think it was good to be bad?

Tim: I don't think it's good to be bad but being bad.....

33. Tim, it's probably a lot easier for you than being good?

Tim: It is but I am just so permanently angry. I am so permanently angry.
Okay

34. Tim, when you decided to get good and your mother saw this loving side of you, do you remember what happened?

Tim: My mum smiled.

Your mum smiled

Tim: She doesn't yell. She doesn't really yell anyways unless I am really naughty. She doesn't yell when I am good!

35. Tim, tell me-when was the last time you saw someone like a mother, like a parent, smile at

you lovingly? When was the last time?

Tim: Well there is my teacher, who I know really well because my mum works on her farm. And she's a lovely lady and she smiles at me a lot!

Really?

Tim: Yah

36. Tim, do you think smiling to you is like grass is to a cow?

Tim: Yah, I do! I do!

37. Tim, does it sustain you?

Tim: It shows me that people are happy. Like you can read what's on their mind!

Really!

38. Tim, oh are you a mind reader?

Tim: No...no but I am when people are smiling.

39. 39.. Tim, are you a heart reader? Can you read people's hearts?

Tim: Yes, I think I can!

40. I think you are too. Tim, you know when your mother is smiling and you decided to do a little bit of heart reading, what can you read in your mother's heart?

Tim: What can I read in mum's heart? When she's smiling she is not worried. And when she's smiling she's not angry. And she's not thinking there's no milk. Or the car needs a new tire. She's not worried.

41. Tim, does that relieve you of any worry that you might have that your mother won't be able to be your mother for much longer?

Tim: Yes...yep because I worried about that for a really long time because everyone just gives me away.

Yah!

42. Tim, do you think you mother is a keeper now and will keep you?

Tim: I think with my mum I am because I have been a real shit to her and she still kept me.

Wow!

43. Tim, did you think that you had to test her a fair bit to see if she would keep you?

Tim: I didn't think about. But I know I was angry...really angry about it when I came to live with mum.

44. Tim, I know this is 15. year old stuff or 18. year old stuff but do you see any connection between being able to warm your mother's heart and make her smile and feeling that she will

keep you and won't surrender you?

Tim: Yah I do!...I do!

45. Tim, do you find like many people who are sure they will be kept that you are sleeping any better at night?

Tim: Yes, for a long time I actually slept in mum's bed which really pissed her off. She couldn't get rid of me because...

Yah, I know.

46. Tim, were you scared?

Tim: The house was echo-y and cold and.. Yah...Yah.

47. Tim, the fact that your mother, despite being inconvenienced, kept you and held on to you and didn't make you go, do you think that proves that she's a loving mother?

Tim: (very softly) Yah! Yah! (nodding head).

48. Tim, why did you decide then to sleep in your own bed? Did that mean that you thought she didn't want you anymore? Or that she would keep you so you could sleep on your own and she could sleep on her own? Or something else?

Tim: Lots of things. We had other people living in our house for a while. And then more people arrived and then we moved. And then I ended up living in a little house with mum but I had my own bedroom again. It was easy because there was only me and mum now. And it is easy to sleep in my own room again.

49. Tim, tell me something- the first night that you slept in your own room and woke up by yourself and greeted your mother at breakfast time, do you think that was something really worth remembering?

Tim: Yah!

50. Tim, what do you remember about that time?

Tim: Well, I remember getting up and I just...I remember there being milk there because the other people hadn't drunk it because there was just me and mum. And mum would always make sure I had milk in the morning. And it was quiet and it was simple.

51. Tim, tell me something- when you drink your mother's milk, is that like mother love?

Tim: I think so because I know it is expensive to buy.
Yes..yes(mmh)

52. Tim, do you find you're a lot more relaxed now that you know you're going to be kept?

Tim: I am...I am but also my school stayed the same too. My principal talks to me a lot.

53. Really – Tim, what do you think he sees in you?

Tim: She's a lady. I know mum has talked to the principal a lot about what's wrong with me. And my principal cares about what I am doing at school and how I am going. And if I have friends

54. Tim, do you think you're getting a reputation in your new school as a good kid or a bad kid?

Tim: I am now. I get really angry still but now I think the teachers trust me to behave.

55. Tim, what teacher at the school thinks you're 'a really, really good kid'?

Tim: I think the principal because she teaches me some time because it is only a little school.
I see.

56. Tim, have any one of your teachers or your principal said to you- "You know Tim, you're a good kid?" or something like that?

Tim: Yes

Can you tell me about it?

Tim: Yes, like keeping my hands to myself when I was getting angry. And that I remember when I didn't live that far from the school that the principal came over once because me and the other girl that lived in the house were having a massive fight in the back..in the garden and the principal came over because she could hear it just to check where mum was and what was going on. And the principal saw it was the girl who was causing the problem. And she really stood up for me with mum and that was amazing because I wasn't the one in trouble

57. Tim, that makes me think of something. She must have had some idea that you were a good kid rather than a bad kid. Do you think you've changed her mind about what kind of kid you are?

Tim: I think I have!

58. Tim, do you know one day when you're say 30. or 40. years old and say you have a son or a daughter, what kind of father do you think you'll be to them when you think about the kind of mother that she's been to you?

Tim: I think my kids will always live with me.

Will they?

Tim:Yah! Yah!

59. So, you'll keep them?

Tim: Yap!

They're keepers!

Tim:Yap! I think I would always give the last bit of food to my children.

60. Tim, you will starve and allow your children to eat?

Tim: Yap! I think I'm not going to hit my children because mum doesn't hit me. Yap!

61. Tim, you're going to relate to your children non- violently?

Tim: Yah! (nodding head vigorously). And I think I would like to have lots of money so my children have stuff.

Yah.

62. Tim, you would like to provide material things for them?

Tim: Mmhuh..nodding head

63. Jane, say Tim does have a son and a daughter and he conducts himself in the way he intends to conduct himself as a father, what kind of grandmother will you be to your grandchildren?

Jane: I would be a proud grandma.

Would you?

Jane: Yah!

Why would you be proud?

Jane: Because then I would see Tim has learned some stuff to provide a nice life for his kids and it is stuff I didn't learn from my parents. It's hard!

64. Jane, would you be proud of yourself when you saw him being the kind of father that he seeks to be?

Jane: Yes...yes I would be. (nodding her head vigorously)

65. Jane, say your granddaughter comes to you some day and asks you this question: 'Daddy told me that he lost you and then you found each other again and never let him go again. And she just says: 'What's the story about that?' What story do you think you'll tell her, say she's 11. or 12. and she's the apple of your eye. What story would you tell her about her Daddy?

Jane: I would say because of mistakes and choices that I made when he was a baby, I lost him and then when he came back.

You found him?

Jane: I found him. He was very naughty with a good heart.(nodding assertively)

66. Jane, if she then said to you: 'Granny, do you think I have my father's good heart? What would you say?

Jane: Yes! (nodding assertively).