

Traveling Companion: I Didn't Bond

Fr. Michael Tracey

When I went on vacation recently I enjoyed some home cooking, lots of late night chatting and visiting; a generous intake of hot tea; plenty of farm work and good, sleep-filled nights. Of course, the best part was knowing that one didn't have an appointments to fulfill or phone calls to make or answer.

Usually, when one returns from vacation, one is asked the proverbial question: "Did you have a nice trip?" It is really an icebreaker; something that one is expected to ask. No one really wants to hear about another person's vacation, especially if the vacation was exceptional. It conjures up envy in the person asking. Vacations are basically subjective and not of any real interest to anyone, other than the participants.

Besides a family and community reunion, mine was rather mundane. But there was one earth-shattering event that captured the imagination of the people of my home parish. It was a celebrity wedding. Our local Abbey, build in 1216, was the setting for the wedding of actor Pierce Brosnan, a.k.a. James Bond and his new wife, Keely Shaye Smith .

The Friday evening, 5 p.m. wedding took place under tight security. The celebrity gossip magazine, "Hello," had paid over a million dollars for exclusive rights to all photographs at the wedding and later at the reception in Ashford Castle. Photographers from other gossip magazines tried in vain to capture the moment but were relegated to picking up the crumbs that fell from the wedding table. Hundreds of onlookers tried get a glimpse of the celebrities as they arrived for the wedding ceremony. White Rolls Royce automobiles brought the bride and groom to the Abbey. Other celebrities from stage and screen in Hollywood arrived in black, window tinted limousines.

Surely I would not want to miss such a historic happening in my own backyard. Surely, I wanted to have something special to tell envious people when I returned from vacation. Surely, I would not pass up an opportunity to get a glimpse of a famous celebrity; Surely, I too, would want to join the hundreds who gathered along the route to cheer on the man who lived dangerously as 007! Surely I wanted to be able to tell people, "Guess who I saw when I was on vacation!"

Yes! I passed up the opportunity. And I did it on purpose. I stayed home. Instead, I spend the time cutting up firewood for my mother to be used for the winter fires.

Someone once said that today' celebrity is tomorrows trivial question. Maybe, that statement put things in perspective for me. I am not an autograph hunter. My only experiences of seeing celebrities are very limited. I saw Princess Grace of Monaco and Prince Rainier as they passed along the road to visit her paternal homestead. I was only a kid at the time. Years later, someone ran up to me with a Meadowlark Lemon, of the Harlem Globetrotters fame, autograph. He was a grand marshal of a Mardi Gras Parade. The autograph got permanently "lost" and I didn't even shed a tear in mourning. Recently, someone, without my asking, got an autograph from "Touched by an Angel" star, Roma Downey. I still have that one "somewhere."

The celebrity wedding did have one reward. Someone delivered some of the flowers from the wedding to our home. We enjoyed the white roses, Freshwater Pearls, Lavender Blooms and Blue Delphiniums, imported from England for the occasion, until they withered into amnesia. So what have I learned from all this? I have learned that when the celebrity wedding becomes a footnote in history, my mother will still have some firewood to keep the home fires burning through the cold winter months.

