

Traveling Companion: Innocent Addie's Exciting

Fr. Michael Tracey

Addie is a ninth grader at a local Catholic school. She is also a member of the parish C.Y.O. Her eyes sparkle with enthusiasm and her curiosity is passionate.

She arrived on Sunday evening for the regular C.Y.O. meeting. Following the meeting, she stood at my office door, taking in all its belongings. Her first exclamation was "Wow!" She followed this up with, "Are all these books yours?" I said, "Yes." "They really are yours," she queried again. I assured her. "I thought all these books belonged to the parish," she pressed some more. I continued to assure her that they were mine. "How could you afford all these books?" she asked. "I bought them over the years," I indicated. "You mean to say, that you have money," she exclaimed. "Of course, I do," I assured her. "I didn't think priests had money!" "Why would you think that?" "Oh! I don't know. That's real neat that you can have your own money."

The conversation became more animated and she asked about the other rooms in the rectory. I showed her the offices and then the kitchen. "Wow! You've got a kitchen here. Do you eat regular food?" I consoled her in telling her that I did. "Do you have a cook?" she asked. "Yes!" "Wow! She must treat you real well!" I nodded my head.

"Where do you sleep?" "In a room," I replied. "Wow! You sleep in a room?" she seemed puzzled. "I assured her and asked, "Where do you think I slept?" "I thought you slept in church by the altar," she indicated.

Her curiosity mounted and she wanted to see my living room/bedroom. "Wow! And you have a TV also. And you can watch TV? "Is that your TV?" I didn't get a chance to answer her as the questions kept coming.

"I see your bike. That's the one you ride along the beach. I saw you riding it one day." I nodded my assent. "I saw you out wearing shorts that day, riding your bike. You mean to say that you can wear regular clothes?" I assured her that my clothes were very regular, and not all were officially black.

After we had finished the tour of the rectory, she returned to her friends and continued with her "Wows!" She went on to share her experience with them. "You never guess what I saw. They have a kitchen back there and they have someone that cooks their meals. And then, in the back, they have rooms where they live and it is real neat and guess what, they can watch TV and wear regular clothes too. Wow! That was neat. I never knew that."

Her eyes continued to dance to the rhythm of her new discoveries. Her voice quivered in excitement. Her lips struggled to form, capture, translate and share her newfound thoughts.

As I thought about Addie's discoveries, I began to wonder about the misconceptions, innocent or otherwise, people have of priests. I realize that some of these misconceptions are based on lack of encounters or on outdated ideas that others have passed on them. I also realize that often I cannot change people's perceptions simply by words. I have to take them on a tour of my life.

So, what am I going to do for Addie now? I am simply going to cut out this article from the newspaper and give it to her and I can imagine her only response, "Wow! You wrote about me. That's neat."