

## Traveling Companion: Some Motherly Advice

### Fr. Michael Tracey

Recently, I read an excerpt from a book by psychologist Martha Manning. It was called "Chasing Grace: Reflections of a Catholic Girl, Grown Up." In it, she shares some motherly advice that she hopes to leave with her young daughter to ponder. I thought the "document to be given to my daughter upon my death" was appropriate for reflection.

She writes, "always be suspicious of a person, a restaurant, or a hotel that describes itself with *clean* as the first adjective. If that is its best quality, I have serious reservations about the honesty or relevance of anything else on the list.

Avoid anything that advertises itself as 'family style.' Family style is a euphemism for chaos and includes all kinds of behavior that I hope you will never tolerate in your own family.

If you insist on being a vegetarian, take vitamins.

Read a lot. Anything you can get your hands on. Roll around in language.

Delight in words. Know the challenge of finding the exact, best, perfect word to define your experience.

Let music continue to be your constant companion. Don't let your tastes fossilize. Try the new stuff. Dance whenever you can.

Learn to cook. I'm, sorry I never taught you. Hopefully, you picked up something from your father.

Continue the rituals of our family. Add to them. Light the candles every Sunday evening during Advent. Fill the living room with at least fifty candles on Christmas Eve. Light every one of them. Allow everyone to open one gift. Appreciate the light as it flickers across the faces of the people you love. Write out elaborate rhyming clues for Easter egg hunts. On July 4, continue with the only baking I ever taught you - our annual flag cake. On Thanksgiving morning, contribute to the feeding of someone else. When you leave your children for trips, give them something they can open every night or morning. A letter, a lollipop - some concrete thing that lets them know you are thinking of them.

Celebrate each transition fully - birthdays, graduations, anniversaries, accomplishments. Observe loss and the memory of that loss over time. Do it enough the same way each year to give you a sense of tradition, and throw in something new to add your own imprint. Rituals are the punctuation marks in our lives. Don't get sloppy with them. Sometimes they are the only anchor in a life that feels adrift.

Cherish your friends. They will be more important for you than for many people.

Even though it requires effort, stay in touch with your aunts, uncles, and cousins. A family helps you to remember who you are and what you come from.

Love like crazy. When you are ready, commit yourself to someone entirely. Expect rough patches, and then expect boring patches that make the rough ones look good. Remember that love in a relationship changes, the same way that a person's face changes over time. But with care, the essence can remain intact.

If you have a child, give yourself generously to her childhood. Not just an hour in the evening after work, or on weekends. Break the rules about who should do what. But don't sacrifice the child in the name of anything.

Find work that you love - even if it's not the work you're getting paid for. Make sure there's always a fire burning someplace in your life. It makes the rest of it bearable. Take chances. Screw up. Don't be polite. It's a total waste of time.

Ask for help when you need it. Know that it is a sign of character and, not as I used to think, a lack of it.

Find a spiritual home. I don't care what religion it is. But give yourself to some belief, to some sense of worship, for awe of that which is beyond you. Read the writings of the many holy women and men through the ages. Their words will infuse your life with direction and purpose. Pray. Work for justice and peace. Know your own strength. Don't let the gravity of the status quo paralyze you and make you complacent. Allow a place in your life for righteous anger.

Don't get too attached to stuff. Everything around you will tell you the opposite. Take pleasure in the things you have. But always ask yourself whether the things you're dying for at the moment is something you *want* or something you *need*.

Make friends with silence. Know the grace of your own company, and I promise you that you will never be alone."