

Traveling Companion: Her Own Purgatory

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Diane's first email arrived on September 11th, 1999. She had just lost her husband through a massive heart attack. I had been emailing him for over a year as he dealt with the sudden death of his sister in an automobile accident. Now, she had started emailing me.

Now I look back over the two inch stack of her emails and my responses to her during the last two years. And I think of all the things they contain; the journey of a soul trying to find peace amid the hurt, anger, bitterness, rejection, and family turmoil.

I look over her first emails and I read, "look! I don't know you and I know you are a priest and I know priests are not ones to talk to me... Look, Father I am not really a bad person at all! You don't know me so I don't expect you to care. But I think somehow in all this I was forgotten and this really sucks. Ok! I am sorry but I am hurting now and I know no one would ever understand...As far as why I am wanting answers and as to if I know what I am looking for! Well, what in the world would you know being a priest and all. You would never understand."

I emailed her back, letting her know that it was a "bit presumptuous to say that I would not understand and to hold that over me. How could anyone understand anything if they have no idea or are never told what they might be asked to understand?"

She responded by saying, "God left me alone to bare all this alone. And maybe one day I will know why and what I did wrong. I know now that God left me a long time ago!" Days later, she wrote, "I could never enlighten you on the shit in my life, ok! No priest ever! No more hurt, ok! No more!"

During the next several months, the emails continued. The hostility softened, the questions continued, the anger abated somewhat until one fateful day she discovered she had cancer. Then, the questions, the anger, the fear, the frustrations continued again as she asked why was God punishing her now. She concluded that it was because she had been such a "terrible bitch" all her life and now it was payback time.

Chemotherapy and radiation became fruitless. She began to treasure each day. She was afraid of sleeping, not knowing if she would wake up.

Someone sent her something to think about. It read: "Sometimes when a struggle I am now going through tries to become a really difficult time, I need to realize that it may be exactly what I need at the time! I need to be willing to get rid of the life I've planned, so that I can have the life that is waiting for me tomorrow." It had a profound effect on her. Fences were mended; bridges built; relationships salvaged; values rethought; special moments treasured.

On July 9th, 2001, I received an email from her, titled, "Remember me...healed, ok!" as I read this three page email, I realized how much healing had taken place in Diane's life; not from cancer, as it was about to claim her; but from the inner scars that tormented and tortured her during her life.

After wishing me a Happy Birthday, she told of her final Mass, confession and anointing in her home and she asked about Purgatory, "What is Purgatory for we as Catholics believe in it? What will he say...do to me? Will I ever see God...despite how bad I have been in the past and all? I don't mind the pain, Mike...if I just know the end result will be to finally meet my Father."

I emailed her back, reminding her that often we go through our own purgatory in this life; that what she had been through, with her illness and the torture and traumas she had experienced, was really a purgatory for her. I ended the email by saying, "you are ready because you have found the peace you so desired and your purgatory has helped you find that peace. So, just remember that the Lord will take you on the interstate to heaven and that there will be no detours along the way. You have done yours and will go home to meet Jesus face to face."

Too weak to read my email to her, some friends read it to her. A short time later, she drifted into a coma and began her journey to meet Jesus face to face at 3 a.m. the next morning.