

## **She checked in again**

She first emailed me in November 2003. She said she got my email address on line and it is still a mystery as to how the Lord put us in each other's lives for a reason and a season. When she first emailed me, she was attending the University of Glasgow in Scotland. She had graduated from a Catholic high school in Northern Ireland. Now, at university, she was studying to be a Merchant Marine officer. While there, she began to take another look at her Catholic faith and was trying to integrate it more closely into her daily life.

She mentioned then that she had started going back to Mass again and was feeling a sense of peace and serenity about it. She struggled to get the confidence to go back to confession. She talked about her fear of the unknown, not knowing what to expect. Being a shy, nervous person, she was afraid of "falling apart" if she went to confession.

During the next two years, she kept in touch with her questions and told me about her impending graduation and her readiness to enjoy a seafaring mission. She still had questions as she took that step from the security of the life on campus to the wide, open seas.

Then she disappeared from the radar screen of my life until a few days ago when I got an email from her. It read as follows:

Dear Fr Tracey, I hope that all is well with you Several years ago, when I was studying at university in Glasgow, I wrote you by e-mail asking you some questions.

In that time a lot has changed, I graduated and fulfilled an ambition and worked at sea, I have got married (unfortunately not in the church) and really life has kept moving. The curiosities about the catholic faith which I had back then in my early student days, unfortunately kind of died away as I started to live life my way (which I now realize wasn't always the right way) and enjoy the finer things, I let my priorities change etc but in the last 9/10 months that has all changed for me.

I have now seriously thought about and began learning about the faith, I have realized that I didn't know an awful lot about it. I have started right back at the beginning. I was ignorant about the teachings of the church but I have definitely had a nudge of some sort to look at it again and this time I am seeing it in a totally different light - it is making so much more sense and has become important to me.

It is in doing this that I recalled some of the advice and information that you passed on to me. How strange that it has popped back into my mind, after many years I recalled emails between myself and someone whom I have never met, who lives in another continent. It is amazing how some of your advice has stayed in the back of my mind. So thanks for that, maybe now, several years later, I will actually consider it and take action on it!

Thanks again. Kind Regards and Best Wishes, Maria

One of the blessings of email is that it allows someone to reach out for help while at the same time, controlling the level of what may be revealed personally. It can be a tempered cry for help, while, at the same time, keeping some control on one's level of vulnerability.

So, here again, I find myself back in Maria's life through the means of emails. Obviously, some of my encouraging words helped her down through the intervening years. Now, she was at a different stage of her journey – been married as well as having spend several years at sea.

I realize that I, too, am at a different stage of my own journey, fed by the wisdom gained from life and its hard knocks, more particularly, from the experience of Hurricane Katrina. I hope that some of that distilled wisdom will help her on her way.

I began to email her and encourage her in her continuing search. Obviously, her sincerity and honesty in her search for personal and faith fulfillment would lead her deeper into her own spiritual journey.

A word of encouragement, a pat on the back, some wisdom along the way will continue to guide her personal ship through any troubled waters ahead. I look forward to Maria's next email as, hopefully, she takes her life to the next level.