

Insanity in the family

The priest sitting opposite me at the meal asked me, “Does insanity run in your family?” I knew what he meant. He was referring to my insane bike rides at 3 a.m. in the mornings.

Of course, to many people, it is insane but sometimes, and in my case, insanity has its own logical reasons which make insanity more palatable.

Why do I do such insane bike rides at 3 a.m. in the morning? It has its own logic. To some, it seems bizarre and not normal and to others, it is a matter of “different strokes for different folks.” Why do people work “different shifts” at work? Some work a normal shift; others work a “graveyard shift” and some of us work an “insane shift.”

Even insane people can justify their actions and mine seem very logical to me. First of all, 3 a.m. is a wonderful time to be out. The humidity is must less and there is always a cool breeze ushering one forward or giving one an opportunity to face the wind of a new day. Secondly, there are sounds that occur at that time that one doesn't notice at busier and more normal times. You hear the sand hitting the power lines as they dance with excitement. You hear the frogs and toads burping away after a good rain. You hear the sounds of distant arguments in late night houses as people clear the air, not knowing their words are carried in the still air.

Thirdly, there are some people going on with life. Of course, the morning paper delivery SUV is making its rounds like a maze, in and out of the streets facing the beach. Some folks are going to or returning from a casino experience. On occasion, one notices two local police cars parked, facing each other as the drivers chat and enjoy a quiet night shift. Of course, there is the odd passing car occupant who shouts obscenities at me as they pass.

Depending on the season, some morning flashlights shimmer in the Gulf waters as eager flounder fisher folks try their luck. On the horizon, fishing boats line up, hoping for a good catch.

During the summer months, some frolicking visitors stand around the dying embers of a party bonfire. The emanating smell of the dying wood visits one's nostrils telling its own tale.

Of course, along the way, there are some surprises like a couple making love on the bike path or a white pickup truck that stops as I am about to pass and three people exit – two men and a woman as they cross onto the beach. The excited woman gives me a cheery “good morning” as I pass. On my return trip, I can hear strange sounds from the sand and make my own judgment on what it might be. I am always amazed at some of the meeting places of people along the way. Two cars are parked close together but the occupants are preoccupied close to the lapping waves.

A 3 a.m. bike ride is an insane opportunity for me to do some purging of the leftovers in my mind and to prepare for the day ahead. It is also an opportunity to meditate on the deeper, more reflective, taken for granted things of life without the busyness or noise of the day that is about to awaken. Some of these journeys become pregnant with the seeds of possible columns for Gulf Pine Catholic.

My 70 minute ride prepares me for the day ahead. On my return, there are the few minutes of chilling out before the morning ablutions. This morning at 4.44 a.m., I entertained a call from Batesville, MS. I was hoping they were not trying to sell me a casket. Then it is a 5 a.m. breakfast and a prayer time for Office of Reading and Morning Prayer before I head to the office to check the latest news at home and away as well as answer some timely emails. A few minutes of preparation for morning Mass and I prepare some reflective thoughts on the readings to carry people through the day. This is followed by my usual morning patrol at the elementary school as I meet and greet the parents and children as they begin another school day. On my return, the office staff is at work and the day continues.

Perhaps all this sounds insane and unnatural to the normal person who has their own routine and different sense of time. But to someone who seems slightly insane, it has its own logical, practicality and normality.

Now, I will have to call each one of my siblings and ask them if they have ever been treated for insanity or if they are aware that insanity might be part of our lives. I know they will assure me that the best therapy is to talk about it and discover if it is insanely unnatural. Consequently, I hope I will not need any white-coat therapy.