

## **Traveling Companion: It's crazy working here!**

Fr. Michael Tracey

I started writing columns for "Mississippi Today" back in 1976 on a regular basis. I still remember my first column. The then and now editor, Janna Avalon, saw potential and encouraged me to write a regular column for the newspaper.

Even today, I continue writing columns over thirty years later. People said of one famous columnist and novelist that "he hadn't an original thought that had not been published." Obviously, he made millions of dollars writing down his original thoughts and ideas. I have not been so fortunate.

Over the decades, I have met some wonderful readers. Some have told me that they look for my column when they first receive the Catholic newspaper. Others, wonder if all the incidents that I write about really happen. I remind them that they do, even if I embellish them or use a little poetic license in the process.

Some people wonder if I am crazy, out at 3:30 a.m. in the morning, biking down the beach. Maybe, I am but such moments often become fertile ground for ideas to germinate and blossom. All I need to do is sit down at the computer with the incident or idea in mind and the column flows to completion.

Other people wonder if I live a strange life considering all the experiences I write about and share. I assure them that I am pretty normal with a peppering of Irish outlook, humor and perspective.

Recently I wrote an article about "Out of the mouths of..." It reflected my experiences and observations on some children I encountered recently. The reaction and feedback from readers around the diocese surprised me. One parent wrote: Hi Fr. Tracey, I just read you article Out of the mouths of..... THANK YOU! You put a smile on my face and made things a little easier for my Sundays to come. See, I have a two year old that likes to talk and is very head strong. It makes it very difficult for my husband and I to get anything out of Mass, because we are worried she is disturbing the people around us. We keep telling ourselves she will get better and she needs to learn how to behave in church. Nonetheless we are there every Sunday (unless someone is sick). I always enjoy reading your articles. Thank you and keep up the great work. Blessings,"

Today, I received a USPS Priority box. The address indicated it was from Ocean Springs. The name did not sound familiar. My Stanley knife pierced its outer shell and I discovered a greeting card, and underneath it, something wrapped in bubble wrap.

On opening the card, I began to read the hand-written note that said, "Dear Fr. Tracey. I want to tell you how funny I found your description of your bathroom without a view/office supply/cleaning supply/office. Perhaps you are the one sent ahead to remind those who have suffered great loss that there is a time for laughter, because we are free and we know there are persuasive reasons to celebrate, because we choose to discover hope. Enclosed is a plaque I thought you might like to have for your office in the hope it will give those who come in a smile."

I searched through the bubble wrap and found it. Its oval shape and message brought a smile to my face as well as to my co-workers. Now I have a decision to make. I will have to wait until our new rectory and offices are built before I can proudly display it. It will grace the entryway from a prominent place.

Maybe if the soothing fountain outside the entryway does not relax the entrants, then surely they will when they see a plaque that says: "You don't have to be crazy to work here. WE'LL TRAIN YOU."