

Traveling Companion: My Godchild, Malia

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My second godchild was born on August 25th 1998. About two weeks premature, she spend a few days in an incubator. I had the privilege of seeing her tiny, full of potential body, the day before I left to return from vacation. I snapped two pictures of her in that incubator with my digital camera and still treasure them. The following year, I had the privilege of being the priest who baptized her and we celebrated in grand style with an extended family dinner. In the days that followed, she grew comfortable with me, as I would carry her outside in the sunshine. Often times, she fell asleep on my shoulder, a peaceful possession. It reminded me of how trusting a little child can be as well as how dependent such a child can be on others.

During that time, I also tried to get her to walk. She held on to my pants as I backed along the corridor and her taking small but giant steps as she peered through my legs, wondering if obstacles loomed ahead. At times, she would pause, get down on all fours and begin her comfortable crawl. I missed the excitement in her face when she finally began to walk for the first time but I was kept abreast of her progress.

This summer, she met her godfather at the airport. She was walking around excitedly with her older sister. I arrived the first day of my vacation in my clerical black suit. Malia shied away from me, choosing instead the more familiar people and comfortable surroundings in her life. When I cast off the black suit, I didn't feel as threatening to her and she began to be more trusting of me.

As time went on, the shyness began to disappear and I became a familiar face amid her familiar surroundings. She began by venturing close to me while she continued to check me out. Eventually, she would sit on my lap and even allow me to take her up in my arms. It was then that I began to discover more and more her curiosity and fascination with life. Her inquisitive mind churned as it tried to understand, capture and embrace the many facets of life around her.

Every morning, I encountered a child with outstretched arms, pleading to a giant man with her one word, "Up." I knew she was ready to go on a voyage of discovery. I carried her to greet her grandmother with a good morning kiss and a child's excitement. Outside, she listened to the sounds all around – to the bleating lambs, the sounds of cars, tractors and trucks as they passed in their own world. She identified them by name. I was fascinated by the way she accentuated the "church," – our neighboring building as well as the sound of its chimes as it counted out the hours of the day.

Her parents kept asking her, "Who is that?" as they pointed to me. She didn't respond until one day, she surprised us by identifying me as "Michael." Now, I was on a first name basis with her.

Other times, when I carried her outside, she would listen to the noise of the airplanes as they crossed the sky and disappeared into different pastures. The small, shiny, winged objects and their trail of smoke fascinated her as they headed out to sea.

Soon, it was time to return to the States. As we came to the airport, her fascination mounted as she excitedly pointed to the waiting planes. Minutes later, I was another body, whisked away in one of these airplanes.

When she arrived home, she continued to listen to the sound of and watch the departing planes overhead. She would simply say, "Michael on plane."

Of course, she will have to wait for a year to see "Michael on plane." In the meantime, I will savor the memories and continue to realize that in our world of accumulation, even a little child can innocently, but powerfully, help us realize what really counts.

