

Traveling Companion: A Very Long Senior Moment

Fr. Michael Tracey

It was Sunday afternoon. I had packed my bags for vacation and taken them downstairs to await my ride to Mobile airport. Just one last thing remained; change into my traveling wardrobe and sip a last cup of tea before beginning vacation.

A very long senior moment followed, how long, I am not sure of! Later, the one who was to take me to the airport, found me standing, "as pale as a ghost" at the top of the stairs, asking her, "What are you doing here?" She said she told me that she was there to take me to the airport – "You're supposed to go to the airport and go on vacation today." She also said that I kept asking her for a cup of tea. In fact, she said that I asked her for eight cups, one after another – enough to re-float the Titanic.

Some time later, Fr. Murphy, several parishioners and Dr. Bill Whitehead, also a parishioner, surrounded me. Dr. Bill convinced me to go to the emergency room to get checked out. He also made sure that I would get immediate attention

Blood work, EKG and a cat scan proved negative. Already, Dr. Bill had made an 8 a.m. appointment with a neurologist the next morning.

I came home from the emergency room and had a light supper. One of the parishioners agreed to stay with me that night – in a separate bedroom, of course. I was angry with myself for blowing my vacation plans; afraid to go asleep in case I would have an eternal senior moment. I found a bruised hip, a black mark by my right eye, a bruised arm, a skinned knee, a sore neck and a crushed ego.

The next morning, I arrived at Dr. Halvertson's office. He checked the funny bones in my legs, counted my toes, fingers, asked me to look into space, asked if I had any slurred speech. I asked him, if having an Irish accent qualified. He ordered more blood work and other tests.

I looked at the sheet of tests to be performed. I almost collapsed in shock. Under MRI it said, "Brain Without." I began to realize I had been masquerading as a brainy priest all those years and now, I didn't have a brain. I was a Teflon Priest.

The blood-sucking nurse arrived with eight empty vials, looking for my blood. I told her that I was very protective of my blood because it may have some regal ingredients. She relented and only filled the vials one-third of the way.

Then, it was on to the M.R.I. Lab, (Memory Relapse Institute,) where I was torpedoed through a tunnel, complete with earplugs and a test for claustrophobia. I was told it would take twenty minutes and that I would hear loud noises. As the loud noises began, I panicked and began to realize that my brain was being pulverized by the sound of jackhammers. I prayed, "Oh God! What are you doing to me? You're turning my brain into mush, I won't have any. I'll be a Scarecrow Priest." Finally, it was over. I quizzed the technicians on the results but they were mute.

Finally home, it was supposed to be a vacation, but not a stay-at-home one. Frantic phone calls to Jeanne, my ever loyal and faithful friend and travel agent, helped. She charmed Delta airlines into giving me a seat on a Wednesday evening flight, at no extra cost.

Parishioners called, queried and prayed. Finally, the neurologist called. He didn't find anything on the MRI scan. I knew it was true – I was a Scarecrow Priest.

Then I realized I was in serious trouble. I had a confession to make. I had been a phantom priest writing articles for *Gulf Pine Catholic*, all those years, under the byline, "Traveling Companion." So I need to go into therapy and confront my bogus nature. If you ever hear from me again, it is because, in another very long senior moment, I will have discovered that, in fact, I do have a brain, after all.