

Traveling Companion: Victoria's Secret!

Fr. Michael Tracey

The phone message indicated she was doing a high school project on "Mississippi Authors and Musicians." She left an email address at hotmail.com. Her phone message informed me that she had chosen me as a Mississippi author and needed to do a report for her English class.

I emailed Victoria letting her know that I would be glad to help her in any way with her project. I also gave her my Web site where she could find more information about me. My curiosity impelled me to check out how she came across my name. In one way, I felt honored that someone was about to check me out as a published author.

She emailed me in return, "Dear Mr. Tracey: I was just writing you to give you an overview on the project that I'm required to do in Junior English. My project is to do research on a Mississippi writer or musician. I choose to do a Mississippi writer and my teacher helped me pick you out to do research on. The requirements for this project are to list all of your major works, a biography, and interview, and an analysis/critical review of one of your major works. I guess you are wondering where I'm at on this project. Well. I'm reading your novel, and finding information about your life using your web site. I have to do an interview with you. I can just email you the questions that I want to ask you and you can just email the answers back to me if that is no problem to you. All the information I am gathering will be put on a website called....Also if it is not a problem for you can I get some pictures of you and your family to put on the web site...I would like to thank you for all the help that you are giving me to make a research project a successful one."

In her next email, she asked for the names of five persons who could testify to my personal well-being and writing skills. I emailed her some references. She followed it up with a list of questions for the "Interview part" of her project. Her questions included: When did you become interested in writing? Was there something in particular that got you interested in writing? How long did it take you to write your novel? Where did you get the idea for this book? Have you received any awards for your writing? How do you come up with topics when writing your columns for the newspaper? Are you currently working on a new book? What is it called? When will it be published? Who is your favorite author/authors? What author do you think has influenced you the most? Do you have any advice for students today about writing? Is the book, even though fiction, based on your life or someone you know/knew? How has Mississippi or living in Mississippi influenced your writing?"

I began to realize, on reading her questions, how much writing has become second-nature to me, how gifts surface, develop, are honed and eventually shared. It is much different being on the "receiving end" of questions, rather than on the "giving end." It is so easy to take for granted a gift that becomes intimately associated with one. When someone, like Victoria, stops, notices, asks, then it makes one grateful to God for such a gift and the ways he molds, shapes, forms and recreates lives through one's use of such gift.

Somehow, a stranger, Victoria, comes into my life and reminds me through her questioning that I should take nothing for granted, especially a gift. Now, I must log on to her project web site and see what she wrote about me.