

Death on a Wednesday Morning

Ed Tracey 1929 - 2010

My Blackberry vibrated signaling a new message at 7:42 AM. The unanticipated message - “*Our beloved friend Ed left us this morning. Pray for Beryl and the family.*” That was how I learned of the passing of Ed Tracey.

Such a man rarely comes our way. Mr. Ed Tracey, the single most consequential adopted son of Geneva – welcome to the public square.

The death of Mr. Tracey deeply saddens me. Although news of his death was not completely unexpected, the loss pierces my heart. My more enduring thoughts bring back a flood of memories that make me grateful for his life and his vocation to the formation and education of children, the least of whom was me.

An Irish-Catholic New Yorker to the core of his being, it is fitting that at the time of his passing he was listening to Celtic music in the month of St. Patrick. He stayed at DeSales almost 35 years roaming the terrazzo floors for so long that he wore out his original hips. Years after stepping down as principal, he continued to form yet another generation of students up to and including this school year as a teacher of religion.

Mr. Tracey launched into the deep just over a thousand students who impact society in a manner disproportionate to their numbers and circumstances. I graduated from DeSales in 1979, and I suspect that I left little to no impression on him. But I now wish I had told him of the imprint he had left on me.

To say that Mr. Tracey taught me anything is a misnomer. Certainly, I took classes from him and was educated in religion, English, and whatever other subjects he taught from time to time. Yet, Mr. Tracey did not teach, he *formed*.

Formation is something different. Formation is not subject to examination or is something that one can lose, forget, or take for granted. Formation is not assessed on the college boards. To be well formed is to have your faith, intellect, and humanity integrally connected and working as one – it is to be fully human.

Christian leaders are not manufactured like stars in Hollywood; their impact is not the mush of the transitory notoriety we are affected by in what passes for leadership. The genuine Christian leader appears on the scene and exercises leadership peculiar to one endowed with genuine practical wisdom offering light, insight, and direction for the greater good, often at personal cost. Such leaders are formed by the likes of Mr. Tracey.

His untiring fidelity to DeSales illustrates to me the high possibilities to which human nature can rise when grace and free will unite. He lived his vocation to form and educate in a very perilous cultural era in a perpetually underfunded, unnoticed, and never properly compensated environment. Mr. Tracey could have moved on I suppose, taken a position at a more prestigious school, moved up for more pay, or entered the

public sector. But, he did not. Nothing distracted him from his vocation to find, form and launch Christian leaders from the corners of High and Pultney. His contributions continue to pay dividends in the lives of the thousand plus he formed to enter into and give hope in the chaos of what is known as the new millennium.

Mr. Tracey was a delightful man and a superb, natural conversationalist. Most knew him better than I, but what I know leads me to one conclusion - he is incomparable. My encounters with him at DeSales changed my life, and I should have told him.

I had hoped that we would someday get together to share stories and discuss the follies and splendors of the Church and culture we share. I had hoped that we could have a few beers, pontificate on the Yankees and brag about our wives and children. But that was not to be. The entirety of the life of the Christian is "Your will be done", not as a note of resignation but as a desire beyond expression. To that end, I commend Mr. Tracey with gratitude to the company of the angels and saints into the presence of the Lord he served with such vigor.

I can only hope that Mr. Tracey's heavenly mansion has terrazzo floors and a big gold D at center court.

Daniel Kane is a Fellow at the Westchester Institute for Ethics and the Human Person and was inducted into the DeSales Alumni Hall of Fame in 2009. Mr. Tracey taught him from 1975 – 1979.