



## In the Footsteps of the 'Jesus Guy': Filmmaker Debuts Work on Carl Joseph, Also Known As 'What's Your Name??' Who Preached in Hazleton.

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**TIMES LEADER**

Oct. 20--PORTSMOUTH, N.H. -- Sixteen years of wandering barefoot and white-robed brought Carl Joseph, the roving preacher known locally as "What's your name?" into a tin-ceiling basement of a New England eatery, a brick wall to the left, a bar to the right, and pipes overhead.

Well, Joseph wasn't here in person, just his image, thanks to the new documentary film "The Jesus Guy." Joseph wanders somewhere in Alabama these days.

In this early settlement town of crooked streets and colonial storefronts, filmmaker Sean Tracey showed his documentary to a small crowd in a makeshift screening room as part of the New Hampshire Film Festival. It's an unadorned look at three years Tracey spent, on and off, following the bible-toting Joseph, who endlessly responded to requests for his name with the query "what's your name?" That's how many people ultimately referred to Joseph, and Tracey kept using the moniker during a question and answer session when the showing ended. Why? "After following him for three years," Tracey said, "it's just the way I think of him."

Tracey's film made no attempt to delve into Joseph's past. "That would have undermined what I wanted to do in the film. I wanted to keep it as what you get if you met him in the street."

So the film omits Tracey's footage of Joseph combing his hair or brushing his teeth ("he has a huge ego," the filmmaker noted). Instead, it shows the preacher as those who met him would remember, walking and talking of Christ.

Joseph is shown in a grassy field meeting an elderly woman in a wheelchair. "I'm dying," she tells him flatly. "How's your relationship with God?" he asks, "Do you have that hope?" He is not talking about hope she will get better -- something she clearly does not embrace -- but that she will see a better future with God. Before they part, she tells him. "I'm getting happier ... I very seldom smile."

Asked by another woman "What is your purpose?" Joseph replies, "To share the word of God, to share the love of Christ."

There is a night scene in which he rejects an offer of cash from a woman. "I don't even use money," he says, and later Tracey vouches for this, recounting Joseph's story of his early days when he toted a backpack with a few dollars. People kept stealing it, and the preacher realized he was expending too much energy worrying about it, so he dropped the practice.

One young man in the film professes he found the Lord after a suicide attempt, and Joseph suggests with a laugh that it is not a path others should consider. Another scene shows Joseph sitting in a bar running through his "what's your name?" routine with a man named "Bob," who obviously grows a bit flustered at what he perceives as a repeated dodge to a simple question.

"There were 70 hours" of film showing Joseph doing this with numerous people. Going through it all became "tedious," Tracey conceded.

Tracey, during the post show interview, was asked if he thought Joseph is bipolar, and conceded the signs seemed to be there -- long bouts of depression followed by tireless days of preaching and walking. When Tracey confronted Joseph with the possible diagnosis, the preacher dismissed it.

Joseph is also shown attending a conference for Charismatic Christians who break into the phenomenon known as "speaking in tongues," a practice that, to a disbeliever, looks like an exercise in zealous gibberish. Later, Joseph sits with a family and warns that, in the New Testament, Paul admonishes against "Prayer tongue."

These vignettes occur in nameless places. If there is no landmark in the background to let you know where the moment was shot, Tracey's film does not tell you. During an interview with a politician, the subtitle reads "Mayor Lou Barletta," not mentioning his bailiwick: Hazleton.

"When somebody comes into town without any shoes, dressed in a robe in the wintertime with a bible," Barletta says, "well obviously he's somebody to keep an eye on."

Police were constantly keeping an eye on Joseph wherever he went, and Tracey included one clip where the cops of Wildwood, N.J., hounded him about getting a permit even though he wasn't soliciting for money. They also ordered Tracey to shut off the camera. A later night scene shows four marked Wildwood P.D. cars parked across the street from where Joseph stands.

"It wasn't the only time we were harassed by police," Tracey said after the film, "but it was the funniest."

Police, he added, were the best way to keep track of Joseph between filming sessions. "They knew where he was, where he'd been, and what direction he was heading when he left."

Tracey's film follows Joseph through the mundane -- pulling a sliver that had slipped into the sole of his foot -- to the more profound, including a rousing and not particularly friendly discussion with some boys in St. Augustine's Preparatory school, or approaching a circle of people praying in the dark outside and softly launching them into a rendition of "Ave Maria."

Along with comments from Barletta, there is former Diocese of Scranton Bishop James Timlin saying "He has a substantial quality; he is not a kook." The screen switches to a scene showing the black-clad Timlin and white-robed Joseph entering a church. "I think he does a great deal of good," Timlin continues, "in his own way."

Tracey noted Joseph lived for two separate stretches with two elderly women who idolized him. "Mary Elizabeth literally threw food under his nose every hour," Tracey said. "But in What's your name's defense, he had Lyme disease that year, and it was a very serious case."

Mary Elizabeth even arranged to have Joseph's father visit, bits of which made it into the movie. It's the only time in the film Joseph's real name is mentioned, when his dad calls him "Carl."

As the movie draws near its end, there are clips of Connie Muir, the other woman who had housed Joseph for a long period, making comments that showed the luster had dulled. She voices concern that he has become too enamored of the media attention. "He's not an exceptional man," Muir says. "He just has exceptional things happen to him."

The movie debuted in Birmingham, Ala., and the New Hampshire Film Festival offered only the second public airing. Tracey said he's looking for a distributor but has yet to land a deal, and that he is also considering independent showings in art houses where Joseph was filmed -- including Hazleton -- if he can find willing hosts.

Tracey said he was first drawn to Joseph through an article in Time magazine. The project drifted on for three years, and in the end, there was no ending.

"I kept hoping he would marry Mary Elizabeth, or shave his beard and get a job, or something," Tracey said. But ultimately the movie had to finish without closure, as Joseph's life remains the same. A few weeks ago, Tracey met up with him and he was still wandering and preaching.

"Did you like him?" one audience member asked.

"That's the hardest question," Tracey replied. "He's less likeable than he is respectable."

"Did you feel a spiritual presence?" another asked.

Tracey noted he has met some great spiritual leaders, including the Dalai Lama, who evoked spiritual awe. "I didn't really get that from What's your name."

Did Joseph see the film, and how did he react?

Joseph was at the Alabama debut, Tracey said, and "he didn't like it at all." Fortunately, he was with some "spiritual advisers and they calmed him down."

Joseph ultimately decided to trek to a party celebrating the debut, where he ran into that standard eatery admonishment that most of us barely notice: "No shoes, no shirt, no service."

"He walked five miles to this party and the lady who ran the place literally threw him out because he had no shoes on."

Have no fear. Tracey scrambled and found someone who loaned a pair of sandals, allowing "The Jesus Guy" to attend the party he had helped create.

On the Web:

[www.thejesusguy.com](http://www.thejesusguy.com)

"I didn't really get that (spiritual awe) from 'What's your name.'"

Sean Tracey Filmmaker

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