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Film follows 'Jesus Guy'

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Sean Tracey first realized that Carl J. Joseph is a very unusual and intriguing person after reading an article in Time magazine about the man he says looks like Jesus Christ and preaches like St. Francis of Assisi.

In fact, because Tracey owns and operates a production company in New Hampshire, he decided to learn more about the man clad only in a white robe who attracted a wide following during his time in Hazleton a few years ago.

He became even more intrigued about Joseph, 39, who wears no shoes (even in winter), walks almost everywhere he goes and has the nickname What's Your Name.

Tracey was so overwhelmed that he decided to make a documentary about What's Your Name – if he could find him and talk him into it.

He did find him — and Joseph agreed to do the film.

During the past three years, Tracey has followed What's Your Name with a camera.

He first shot footage of him in Bethlehem, where he was living, then in Scranton, Philadelphia, along the Jersey coast and Hazleton, where he has paid brief return visits.

"I spent three days with him with a camera just to try and understand who he was and what he was doing," Tracey said. "Those three days were very intriguing, and I left him with more questions than I had answers."

The documentary will be called "The Jesus Guy" and is in final editing.

It will be shown first at film festivals.

"Then, hopefully, we'll find some highly interested distributors who'll be able to transform it into a movie or a TV production if

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we get real strong interest from the TV market," Tracey said.

He said his purpose in producing the documentary was to follow the time-honored tradition of pursuing the truth.

And the truth about What's Your Name, Tracey learned, is that he is either loved or hated.

"Some say he's a 'kook' but others say he's 'a blessing from God,'" Tracey said.

Clad in a white robe, What's Your Name has walled through 47 states and 13 countries on a 12-year mission that has captured media attention from 20/20 and the Wall Street Journal.

"The Jesus Guy" documentary covers the mystical journal of America's "Barefoot Evangelist."

"In a nation that worships money, he's penniless," Tracey said. "In a culture that idolizes celebrities, he has forsaken his identity. Now, on a spiritual quest that even he doesn't fully understand, his faith – and your own – will be tested, every step of the way."

That is why Tracey was so eager to capture the life and times of What's Your Name.

"What kind of person gives up everything to spread the word of God?" Tracey said. "To some, he's an inspiration. To others, a threat. So what in God's name is he doing traveling across country and through a dozen countries? "

Tracey said filming "The Jesus Guy" was a truly fascinating opportunity.

"I hope viewers will share this experience as though they were there, too," he said. "This itinerant, barefoot evangelist has undertaken an arduous, inspirational journey that he feels is his mission from God."

Tracey said his intent while filming the documentary was to "be a true observer, not a participant.

"In the tradition of my friend, adviser and noted documentary filmmaker, Albert Maysles, I have done my best to make a film that is true, authentic, unadorned," Tracey said.

He said "The Jesus Guy" is a film grounded in the moment – what's happening – and follows that moment as it unfolds.

"The intent is not to create an expose or delve into this man's past," Tracey said. "Concentrating on the moment makes the most captivating story, leaving many questions unanswered, and room in the imagination of the viewers to believe what they will about the origin and intentions of this man."

During his countless hours spent with What's Your Name, Tracey found he has only one piece of clothing – a white, homespun robe.

He accepts no money, has no home and carries neither food nor water – only a prayer book.

"The contrast between the lifestyle he has adopted and our current culture is riveting," Tracey said. "Meeting What's Your Name will cause you to examine your own life's commitments and choices."

Tracy revealed two stories involving his time with What's Your Name.

After trying unsuccessfully to contact him, a friend told him that he heard What's Your Name was planning to attend a Catholic Charismatic religious conference in Wildwood, N.J., over the coming weekend. He drove 10 hours from Portsmouth to see if he could find him.

"I had just pulled in front of a hotel in Wildwood when my cell phone rang and my wife said she just had a call that What's Your Name would be staying at that same hotel," he said. "While I was still on the phone, I looked back over my shoulder and there in the distance I saw him."

Another time, Tracey accompanied What's Your Name on a walk of several miles during which the preacher cut his foot on a piece of glass and sat down to extricate the glass and tend to the wound.

"The bottom of his foot absolutely intrigued me," Tracey said. "He had walked all day in his bare feet – I was wearing hiking boots – and yet the bottom of his feet were as smooth as a baby's."

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