

his life journey should show us how small the world really is, how connected we all really are. Still, it's a wonderful revelation when we grasp that insight for ourselves.

Catherine Boone Kieler and I were on our way to becoming "heart friends" before each of us realized our "Merton connections." Perhaps those connections became the glue to bind us uniquely. I had worked with Cathy at St. Mark's High School in Wilmington, Delaware, for two years before finding out that she grew up on a farm just a few miles from Gethsemani. She tells stories, with great southern charm, about the monks from Gethsemani who used to come and help her father harvest his crops. She also tells a wonderful story about the time she met Merton. She was twelve years old and had walked over to the Abbey's bookstore to buy a book by their celebrity monk/author. She recounts that she looked around the bookstore, unsure which way to go, when a nice man in "big overalls" asked if he could help her. When she explained that she wanted a book by "the famous Thomas Merton," Cathy says, the man rolled his head back and gently laughed "a big laugh." It was in the laugh that she recognized Thomas Merton.

Cathy and I have grown closer because of our ability to share "pieces of Merton." One of her most unique "Mertonisms" harkens back to geography and the irony of universal connections. Cathy and her husband, Dan, had been working through an international adoption agency in the hopes of adopting a child. Finally, a child became available, but it would require their willingness to travel very far to meet the child to make sure that the placement would be appropriate. Cathy and Dan were willing. So they traveled to Bangkok, Thailand, where they met their new son. That son, Kurt, is a beautiful and talented gift from the East. When I see him and his mother holding hands and walking together through the halls at St. Mark's, I can't help but see "Kentucky and Bangkok holding hands," and they seem perfect together. At moments like that, I have also imagined Thomas Merton looking down upon such a scene and smiling one of those "Fr. Louie" smiles.

I have been greatly influenced by the writings of Thomas Merton and by the man. And I value both the spiritual dimension of such an influence and the "personal touches." I believe Merton would approve. In *No Man is an Island*, Merton writes that the integrated life of the spirit "puts us in the fullest possible contact with reality." We know in a very basic and intuitive way that "reality" is much bigger than just that which we can see or only that which can be verified. Language creates reality. People of all times have found that in the telling of their stories they have come to know God. And so it is in sharing personal reflections about someone like Thomas Merton. Thanks for your goodness, Louie. It means a lot. I hope we meet again soon.

TWO HAIKU FOR LOUIE

by **Rose Gordy**

LOUIE

My friend across time
His books, poems, classes on tape
Lead and inspire me.

ON THE PORCH AT HIS HERMITAGE

Centering with him
His presence surrounding me,
I pray for the world.