

Robert E. Daggy – Reminiscences and Tributes

By Paul M. Pearson, Christine M. Bochen, Jonathan Montaldo,
Gregory Ryan, Bonnie Thurston

Robert E. Daggy (1940-1997) was at the heart of Thomas Merton studies for more than two decades. He was Director of the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University from 1980 until shortly before his death, longtime editor of *The Merton Seasonal* from his arrival at the Center as archivist and associate director six years earlier, one of the trio of principal founders of the International Thomas Merton Society in 1987, main organizer of the First ITMS General Meeting two years later, the society's second president (1989-91) and resident secretary until his final illness, prolific editor and writer on Merton. His legacy continues through the Daggy Scholars program that makes it possible for young people to attend Merton Society General Meetings every two years. To commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death on December 15, 1997, this issue of *The Merton Seasonal* brings together reflections by five close friends and associates who knew him well and provide affectionate and perceptive insights on the life, the work and the ongoing significance of this central figure in the community of Merton scholars and readers.

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Daggy at His Desk

Robert Edward Daggy was born in New Castle, Indiana on July 28, 1940 and lived in Henry County, Indiana until he was eighteen years old. His family had settled the county and lived there for several generations. His father's family were birthright Quakers and had come in a migration of Quakers out of the South and slave territory to the free soil of the old Northwest Territory.¹ At eighteen Robert Daggy went up to Yale as an undergraduate and upon graduating in 1962 he went on to Columbia University for a year. He once noted how Merton had loved Columbia and hated Cambridge,

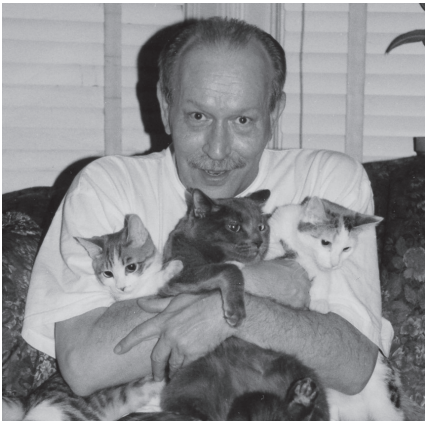
calling it the darkest year of his life, whereas he had hated Columbia and loved Yale. From Columbia he went back to Yale for two years as an assistant to the archivist in charge of Yale memorabilia. It was at this point that his interest in archival work and literary estates developed. From Yale he went on to the University of Wisconsin, Madison where he received a doctorate in history for his thesis entitled "Measures for Yalensia: Naphtali Daggett and Yale College, 1766-1778." After completing his doctorate he taught in Wisconsin for two years.

It was at this point that he was hired as a consultant to the Merton Legacy Trust. It was at a time when Merton studies were in an embryonic stage. Very little had been published since Merton's death – John Howard Griffin's *A Hidden Wholeness*² and Ed Rice's *Man in the Sycamore Tree*³ – but with the publication of Merton's *Asian Journal* in 1973⁴ the Merton industry began to develop.

As Director of what was initially called the Thomas Merton Studies Center, up until ill health forced him to resign, Robert Daggy oversaw the vast growth in Merton Studies which has led to Merton's recognition as one of the great spiritual writers of the twentieth, and now the twenty-first, centuries. Robert Daggy became an international force in the Merton world through his own writings,⁵ the books he edited,⁶ those scholars he encouraged and guided, and through the love and friendship he brought to all those interested in Thomas Merton. He also played a prominent part in the development of Merton studies on the international scene, making numerous trips abroad to encourage fledgling Merton groups, including visits to Belgium, the United Kingdom, Spain and China.

It was on such a visit to England in 1987 that I first met Bob, after corresponding with him for a number of years. It was a typical meeting – he was standing in the sun outside the church where the conference was being held, smoking whilst William Shannon lectured inside. Although a Merton Society did not get off the ground on that visit, he returned to England in December 1993 for a conference at Winchester, convened by the late David Scott to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Merton's death, where the Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland was finally formed.

I have some particularly fond memories of that visit as I hosted Bob during his stay. As well as attending the Winchester conference, we visited old friends and new – Patricia Trunfull, a longtime Merton aficionado and correspondent of Bob's on the Isle of Wight;⁷ Selima Hill,⁸ a poet and the daughter of the artist James Wood, who had been a friend of Owen Merton in his youth, and from whom she'd inherited a number of Owen's paintings; Frank Merton Trier⁹ (1919-2003), a cousin of Thomas Merton with whom he'd stayed on a number of school vacations; Primrose, a resident of a local L'Arche community where we'd accepted an invitation to supper and prayer. Bob spent



Bob Daggy with Cats

much of the evening with his hand held in a vice-like grip by Primrose, an evening he would frequently recall. The following year I visited Louisville to work at the Studies Center. Bob hosted my visit and, besides assisting in my research and giving direction to my thesis, was also a splendid host, introducing me to many of his friends, his cats (Bruiser, Edna Best and Esther Rose), to the delights of Kentucky life and to Manhattans, made with his favorite bourbon, Very Old Barton.

When I next saw Bob he was already feeling the effects of the disease, systemic mastocytosis, which would eventually take his life, though at that stage he attributed it to a virus he thought he had picked up on his visit to China. It was to be two years before my next

visit and in that time, despite loving and expert care, his health had worsened dramatically. Those times I spent with Bob in June 1997 will long remain with me – he had not lost his sense of humor, or his famous braces (suspenders to Americans), and the old glint was still in his eyes. Bob quizzed me about his friends in England and about the way the British Merton Society was developing and as I left him, his final words were that he would see me at the Oakham conference in 1998. However, that was not to be. He died on December 15, 1997.

Shortly after Bob Daggy's death I published a version of the preceding short tribute in the *British Merton Journal*,¹⁰ writing from a variety of perspectives: that of a young Merton scholar who had spent time at the Merton Center using the archives for research; an active member and international advisor of the International Thomas Merton Society and founding member and secretary of the Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain; and a Daggy friend and mentee. But little did I realize at that time that twenty-five years later I would be looking back at Bob Daggy's legacy as Director and Archivist of the Thomas Merton Center from a very different perspective, having spent almost an equivalent number of years in that position myself.

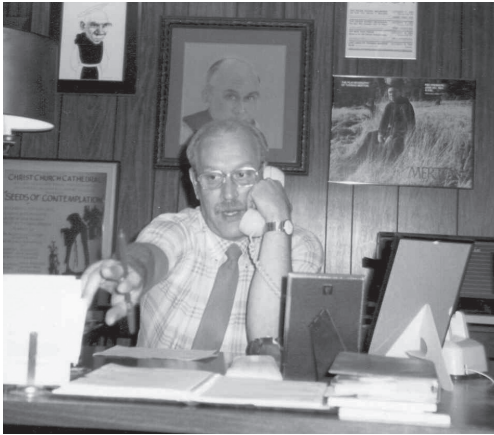
A portrait of Bob Daggy by Jim Cantrell adorns one of the reading rooms at the Merton Center, a room dedicated to Bob's memory at the time of the dedication of the Merton Center in the newly built W. L. Lyons Brown Library at Bellarmine University on October 10, 1997, a mere two months before Bob's passing. As new generations of seekers, scholars, Merton aficionados and visitors pass through the Center I am frequently asked questions about the subject of the portrait and his significance for the Merton Center and Merton Studies.

My understanding of the significance of the work achieved by Bob Daggy continues to grow as my understanding of Merton's achievements grows. In contradistinction, my understanding of how Merton accomplished what he did (basically in the same time span¹¹ as Bob and I have each served as Directors of the Merton Center) decreases as new materials come to light, and as scholars and others distill further insights from the extraordinary legacy Merton bequeathed us.

Monica Furlong once described 1966 as "a rather quiet time in Merton's life"¹² and that description would also be well suited to research and publication by and about Merton in the immediate decade or so after his death. Indeed, the assessment of Merton at around the tenth anniversary of his death and the publication of the Furlong biography marked significant changes in the level of interest in Merton's life and thought. However, that change was only made possible by the extraordinary work Robert Daggy had been doing with the Merton archives since his appointment as archivist at the Merton Center in 1974.

Bob Daggy's early years at the archives were marked by his highly dedicated and skillful classification and organization of Thomas Merton's papers. This work, borne witness to by the phenomenal card catalog Daggy built over the course of many tireless years of highly detailed sifting of the motherload of papers transferred to Bellarmine after Merton's death, would give him the intimate knowledge of the collection that would allow him to guide researchers and scholars in their mining of the collection for their books, essays, theses and dissertations. Without this foundational work by Bob Daggy, the flourishing of scholarship and publication that would follow – and I cannot emphasize this strongly enough – would not have been possible.

The work that has been undertaken at the Merton Center in the twenty-five years since Bob Daggy's death has indeed just been standing, archiving, on the shoulders of a giant. Modern



Daggy Multitasking

Life on the twenty-fifth anniversary of Merton's death he reflected on his own experience as director of the Merton Studies Center and on a dream montage he had about Merton and his work at the Center. He concluded that article saying: "Merton's finger points us toward many things, but in the end they are all the same. He points us 'home,' to where we belong, to where we are 'all pieces of the paradise isle.' In my Merton montage, whether waking or sleeping, that is the important thing. That is what appeals to me."¹³ It was that appeal which Robert Daggy shared with the Merton community and which he expressed in the powerful titles he chose for the letters and journals of Merton that he edited – *The Road to Joy* and *Dancing in the Water of Life* – titles which express his own zest for life and the zest he discovered in Merton.

Paul M. Pearson

1. Parts of this tribute are based on a 1993 interview by Carl Simmons; see "Keeper of the Silent Lamp: An Interview with Robert Daggy," *Burning Light: A Journal of Christian Literature* 1.1 (February 1993) 28-30. See also Thomasine (Tommie) O'Callaghan, "Remembering Bob Daggy," in Patrick F. O'Connell, ed., *The Vision of Thomas Merton* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2003) 15-22; subsequent references to this memorial volume will be cited as "Vision."
2. John Howard Griffin, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Visual World of Thomas Merton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970).
3. Edward Rice, *The Man in the Sycamore Tree: The Good Times and Hard Life of Thomas Merton* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970).
4. Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal*, ed. Naomi Burton Stone, Brother Patrick Hart and James Laughlin (New York: New Directions, 1973).
5. For a complete bibliography, see *Vision* 224-32.
6. These include the second volume of Merton's collected letters: *The Road to Joy: Letters to New and Old Friends* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1989) and the fifth volume of the complete journals: *Dancing in the Water of Life: Seeking Peace in the Hermitage. Journals, vol. 5: 1963-1965* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997); as well as *Day of a Stranger* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs M. Smith, 1981); *Encounter: Thomas Merton and D. T. Suzuki* (Monterey, KY: Larkspur Press, 1988); *Thomas Merton in Alaska: The Alaskan Conferences, Journals, and Letters* (New York: New Directions, 1989); "*Honorable Reader*": *Reflections on My Work* (New York: Crossroad, 1989) (a revised version of *Introductions East and West: The Foreign Prefaces of Thomas Merton* [1981]); and *Monks Pond: Thomas Merton's Little Magazine* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1989). He was also co-editor with Marquita Breit of *Thomas Merton: A Comprehensive Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1986), co-editor of the first five volumes of *The*

technology and the internet have allowed us to make Daggy's classification of the collection and the finding aids available in new ways to a much wider audience around the world. Daggy's original finding aids have been substantially developed in breadth and depth whilst all the while taking care to preserve Merton's original papers to current archival requirements and to integrate countless new acquisitions into the collection.

As the sole and preeminent guide and keeper of Merton's legacy for more than two decades, Bob Daggy's own interest in Merton would gradually develop alongside his friendship, mentoring and accompaniment of innumerable scholars. In an article Bob wrote for *Spiritual*

- Merton Annual* (1988-92) and editor of *The Merton Seasonal* from 1976 through 1996.
7. See Patricia Trunfull, "Merton at Brooke: A Photo-Essay with Photographs by Patricia Trunfull," *The Merton Seasonal* 13.4 (Fall 1988) 4-5 (available at: <http://merton.org/ITMS/Seasonal/13/13-4Trunfull.pdf>).
 8. Selima was a participant of the 1993 Merton conference in Winchester where she gave a poetry reading, including her autobiographical poem, "A Girl Called Owen," included in *The Merton Journal* 2.1 (Easter 1995) 21-24 (available at: <http://www.thomasmertonsociety.org/Journal/02/2-1Hill.pdf>).
 9. For an account of our visit to Frank Merton Trier see Robert Daggy, "Discoveries & Rediscoveries Twenty-Five Years after Thomas Merton's Death," *The Merton Seasonal* 19.1 (Winter 1994) 2-3 (available at: <http://merton.org/ITMS/Seasonal/19/19-1Daggy.pdf>).
 10. Paul M. Pearson, "Robert E. Daggy – A Tribute," *The Merton Journal* 5.1 (Easter 1998) 17-19.
 11. I.e. two decades, from the publication of *The Seven Storey Mountain* in 1948 to his death a mere twenty years later.
 12. Monica Furlong, *Merton: A Biography* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980) 297.
 13. Robert E. Daggy, "Merton Montage: A Reflection on Thomas Merton Twenty-Five Years after His Death," *Spiritual Life* 39.4 (Winter 1993) 207.

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Memories of my first meeting Robert E. Daggy in May 1987 and our last visit in December 1997 are equally vivid. Bob hosted the meeting of the fourteen founders of what would become the International Thomas Merton Society in Bonaventure Hall on the campus of Bellarmine, then College, now University. Those of us who had travelled to Louisville had accommodations in Bonaventure Hall which also housed the Merton archival collection. I was awed by my first glimpse of the Merton Center and honored and humbled to be among persons, some of whom knew Merton personally, and all of whom were immersed in reflecting on and advancing his legacy. Even in this august group, Bob Daggy stood out. Welcoming yet reserved, at once serious and witty, cigarette in hand, he was a fine host. Together with William H. Shannon and Br. Patrick Hart, he had convened the meeting. There and then the International Thomas Merton Society was born and I became the first corresponding secretary. When I arrived, I knew only Bill Shannon; when I left the seeds of new friendships had been sown and had already begun to take root, among them my friendship with Bob.

The last time I saw Bob was in December 1997 – just days before his death on the fifteenth of that month. I was in Louisville to join Br. Patrick Hart for a book signing for the sixth volume of Merton's journals – *Learning to Love*. I will always be grateful to Tommie O'Callaghan for encouraging me to visit Bob at home even though, knowing how seriously ill he was, I was hesitant to intrude on his privacy. I brought Bob a red rose and shared with him a memory I will always treasure. A few years earlier when I had come to work at the Merton Center, Bob met me at the airport. He was dressed smartly, wearing those signature red suspenders, with a huge, lushly fragrant magnolia in hand. The magnolia scented my room at the Red Roof Inn for a week. I recalled the moment and told Bob how touched I was by the gift of the magnolia and how thankful I was to him for his years of support, encouragement and friendship. I confessed that I had wanted to bring him a magnolia but, alas, all I could find in Louisville, in a cold December, was a rose. That brought a smile to Bob's lips and tears to my eyes as Bob confided that he was "ready."

In the decade between that first meeting and the last, I recall many visits to the Center (including one during which he left me locked in the Center to do my work while he went to lunch – definitely a sign of trust). There were other times when we both took breaks and shared meals, conversation and laughter. I recall the ITMS Program Committee meetings and the General Meetings when we



**Daggy at the Original
Merton Studies Center**

volume, *Courage for Truth*;² Bob edited the fifth journal volume, *Dancing in the Water of Life*,³ and I the sixth, *Learning to Love*.⁴ Bob, along with the other editors of the letters and journals, especially William H. Shannon and Patrick Hart, as general editors of the letters and journals respectively, modeled what the task of editing letters and journals entailed: accuracy, precision, a sense of the big picture – and imagination.

It might appear strange to speak of the role imagination can play in the task of editing another's correspondence or personal journals. But I do not think it odd at all. Editing someone's personal writings is more than an act of simple transmission. Bob showed me that editors of such materials can and must enter into the material in ways that can help to mediate their meaning and significance for readers. The titles Bob chose for the volumes – *The Road to Joy* and *Dancing in the Water of Life* – illustrate my point. Each offers an inviting image drawn from Merton's own texts. Each reveals Bob's keen eye for images that capture and frame a text in ways offering readers a lens through which they might view the text.

The title *The Road to Joy*, admittedly my favorite, comes from a letter to young Grace Sisson (see *RJ* 352) who had sent Merton a drawing that inspired him to write the poem "Grace's House" and later a drawing she entitled "The Road to Joy." As Bob tells us in his introduction to the book (*RJ* ix-xiv), the collection is a celebration of friendship and of the joy Merton found in friendship. The letters in this volume (and the others) testify to the breadth of Merton's circle of friends. They also bring to mind Merton's realization that friendship, as he wrote to Pope John XXIII, was "an apostolate."⁵ Among the most charming and delightful letters Bob chose to include are letters "to and about" young people, particularly his letter to Susan Chapulis in which the monk breaks open the meaning of contemplation in words that resonate whether one is a sixth-grader or a sixty-year-old: "when your heart is quiet, you suddenly realize that everything is extremely beautiful and that just by being quiet you can almost sense that God is right there not only with you but within you" (*RJ* 350-51). What is abundantly clear in Merton's letters to friends, old and new, is that we do not travel the road to joy alone; we travel that road together. Bob knew this as well and, like Merton,

gathered in Louisville, Rochester, Colorado Springs, Mobile and so on. I admit I was intimidated by Bob at first (Bill Shannon readily confessed to me that he had been too). As an archivist and curator, Bob exuded the full authority of the office. I knew there were "rules" and I was determined to abide by them – even when I was unsure what they were. But soon I enjoyed the familiarity of friendship – even as I grew to appreciate and admire ever more deeply Bob's knowledge of the collection and insight into Merton's legacy.

As I look back on Bob's work and mine, I realize that we shared a special bond. We each had the privilege of editing volumes both of Merton's letters and of Merton's journals. In each case, Bob's volume came before mine. Bob edited *The Road to Joy*,¹ the second of the five volumes of letters, and I edited the fourth

Bob experienced the joy of an ever-widening circle of friends as Merton's friends became Bob's own.

Bob entitled the fifth volume of Merton's journals *Dancing in the Water of Life*, taking his title from the concluding words of Merton's "Message to Poets," a piece Merton wrote in 1964: "Come, dervishes: here is the water of life. Dance in it."⁶ Merton's invitation to the young poets meeting in Mexico City echoed what he had written just a few years earlier in *New Seeds of Contemplation*, urging his readers to hear God's "call and follow Him in His mysterious, cosmic dance."⁷ Bob reminds us that as Merton neared his fiftieth birthday, he was wrestling with absurdity – in the world and in his own life. But that was not the whole of it as Bob realized when he entitled Part III of Merton's journal "The Joy and Absurdity of Increasing Solitude" (*DWL* 119). Reading Bob's introduction to this journal (*DWL* xi-xviii), I sense that he resonated with the often paradoxical Merton we encounter in this journal. Merton was experiencing ever more deeply the inexorable mystery of life and death and, I sense, Bob was doing the same.

Bob Daggy's friendship is a blessing many of us are privileged to have enjoyed. His contributions to Merton studies, marked meticulous research and deep insight, comprise a lasting legacy. For both the friendship and the legacy, I am most grateful.

Christine M. Bochen

1. Thomas Merton, *The Road to Joy: Letters to New and Old Friends*, ed. Robert E. Daggy (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1989); subsequent references will be cited as "RJ" parenthetically in the text.
2. Thomas Merton, *The Courage for Truth: Letters to Writers*, ed. Christine M. Bochen (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1993).
3. Thomas Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life: Seeking Peace in the Hermitage. Journals, vol. 5: 1963-1965*, ed. Robert E. Daggy (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997); subsequent references will be cited as "DWL" parenthetically in the text.
4. Thomas Merton, *Learning to Love: Exploring Solitude and Freedom. Journals, vol. 6: 1966-1967*, ed. Christine M. Bochen (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997).
5. Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love: Letters on Religious Experience and Social Concerns*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985) 482.
6. Thomas Merton, *Raids on the Unspeakable* (New York: New Directions, 1966) 161.
7. Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1961) 296.

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In a taxonomy of Merton readers, having begun reading him avidly when I was thirteen, I belong to the *aficionados*. Yes, I did a master's thesis at Emory on Merton's autobiography, but among the guild of real scholars of Thomas Merton, I am middle tier. Fortunately for me and so many other readers of Merton, Robert Daggy welcomed everyone's interests and abilities. Like his colleague Brother Patrick Hart at the Abbey of Gethsemani, any visitor at what was back then in 1988 a very small Merton Room under a dormitory at Bellarmine, would be welcomed by Bob with enthusiasm and respect.



Patrick Hart and Bob Daggy

When I traveled to the Merton archives and met Bob during a sabbatical from my business, he was in a “let’s grow this thing” mode with his two other major Merton legacy catalysts, Brother Patrick and Msgr. William H. Shannon of Nazareth College. I came to the archives for the first time to pay my respects to Merton and to volunteer for any project that Daggy might offer me. As a result of our meeting, I transcribed four of Merton’s “working notebooks” in facsimiles using a typewriter. I added notes and bibliographical material and introductions. After a year of doing that work, Patrick Hart asked me to edit the second volume of Merton’s journal.¹ I was happily “called in from the cold” to the temperate climate of the Merton world. I owe the best years of my life reading Thomas Merton with the rest of the ITMS members to the firm of Daggy, Hart and Shannon.

Robert Daggy possessed a critical intelligence. He suffered no fools gladly and once or twice he demonstrated with a frozen smile that he would not suffer me. He was foremost an historian and archivist. I rarely caught a glimpse of what he actually thought about Merton but he was most generous with those of us who approached Merton – how should I put it – breathlessly? Bob mentored me and other friends, like Sheila Milton and Erlinda Paguio, to engage Merton more strenuously. He loved all the fans who came to his office, but he urged us to become more solid contributors to the conversation about the perduring values of Merton’s legacy. He invited us to write for *The Merton Seasonal* which he edited. He urged us to participate in conferences. He was always a generous mentor to those who might have been intimidated by the genuine scholars already steeping in Merton studies.

He loved to network the Merton folks who engaged him as the director of the archives. He introduced us to the center ring-mistress of the Merton circus, Tommie O’Callaghan. With Hart and Shannon, he grew the roots of the expansive tree that the ITMS is today.

It was my honor to abide with him in his home for a month during an illness that would take him from us at the young age of fifty-six. I spoke at his funeral in the Skakel Chapel at Gethsemani. Becoming one of his many Merton friends and acquaintances, I knew this guy had blessed me beyond any small hopes for more engagement with others reading Merton than I might have had when I traveled to Louisville to see the archives.

I never walk through the lay cemetery to reach Gethsemani’s church without casting an eye in gratitude toward his tombstone. In the index of my spiritual autobiography, I gratefully acknowledge that Bob Daggy is a significant entry. May his memory and contribution to Merton studies perdure and continue to be of benefit.

Jonathan Montaldo

1. Thomas Merton, *Entering the Silence: Becoming a Monk and Writer. Journals, vol. 2: 1941-1952*, ed. Jonathan Montaldo (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996).

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I first met Bob Daggy at Columbia University’s “Thomas Merton Symposium and Study Day” in November of 1978, commemorating ten years since Merton’s death. I had been corresponding with him since 1974, when he was curator and assistant director of the Merton collection at Bellarmine College. During a break in the morning’s session, I ran into Bob in the hallway. I introduced myself. “Oh, Greg Ryan from Wall, New Jersey.” *Yup, that’s me.* I noticed how well-groomed and



Dressed for Success

well-dressed Bob was. A bit balding then, with a well-trimmed mustache. Jacket and tie, of course. Tan buck shoes. Dressed for success.

Bob had an unbelievable sense of humor. A few years, and dozens of letters and weekly phone calls later, I visited with Bob at his home in Louisville. One afternoon we were walking through a shopping mall. Bob was on a mission to get something or other at Lord & Taylor's or Nordstrom's and I suggested we take a shortcut through JC Penney. "Oh no, we can't do that!" *Why not?* "The cheap dyes make my eyes water."

One afternoon, I sat poolside at a friend's home where he went once a week to play bridge. (He was a proud Grand Master, as well as a Kentucky Colonel.) I guess my old, beat-up ball cap was not up to his standards: Soon after I got back home to New Jersey, a package arrived with a yellow Nautica cap inside – not my normal fashion choice, for sure.

Not only was Bob always well dressed, but his home was always well-appointed. The "Presidential" guest room where I stayed had a patriotic theme, from the bedspread and wallpaper, to the photos and posters on the walls, and various patriotic memorabilia on the tabletops. Year-round, he kept his dining room table set with a seasonal or holiday theme, ready for the next group of friends to dine with him. He wrote to me once about a set of somewhat "kitschy" coffee mugs that delighted him. Somehow, at brunch, whenever guests took a sip of coffee, a little would dribble onto their tie. (Ties at Sunday brunch!?)

In Bob's living room there was a huge abstract oil painting, maybe 4'x4', filled with what appeared to be dozens of floating clouds or soft pastel-colored beachballs. He said his mother hated it. The painting was titled "Smoke." Appropriately so, for someone who smoked like a chimney – and had the smoker's cough to go with it. But you couldn't even try to talk to him about how it was bad for his health! He'd hear none of it.

Over the years, I learned what a huge film buff Bob was. He and his Louisville friends and Bellarmine colleagues dressed up in their finery for their annual Academy Awards dinner, watching the festivities on TV. His steel-trap memory impressed me during a drive to New York where he was to give a talk at St. John's University. I asked him something about who won a certain award. "For what year?" *Huh?* "What category?" *H-u-u-u-u-h-h-h?!!* Not only could he tell you the winners, but he could tell you the nominees – *for each category. For any year.*

In the mid-1980s, plans for a Merton Society were developing. Bob invited me to participate in an Elderhostel weekend at Bellarmine to mark the publication of Michael Mott's official biography, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton*.¹ Bob had lined up a number of speakers for the week. My presentation was titled "Thomas Merton as The Lone Ranger, or, Who Was That Unmasked Man?" Msgr. William Shannon was also there to speak about the publication of Merton's letters. Bob was the perfect host to one and all. At the end of the weekend, Bill Shannon came to Bob's home and, during the visit, he and Bob brainstormed a list of scholars whom they would invite to launch this new society. I was deputized to take notes of their conversation and the names of those who would become the Founding Members of the International Thomas Merton Society.



**Bob Daggy with Caitlin, Abbey
and Greg Ryan, 1987**

(Many years later, it caused me some embarrassment when I mistakenly identified myself in a piece in the *Seasonal* as a “founding member.” I had thought that honorific simply referred to anyone who had “gotten in on the ground floor” of the new society. But as I was looking through my “Daggy Files” to prepare for this piece, I came across Monsignor Shannon’s original mailing to solicit interested Merton readers to become “charter members” of the new Society. That clarified things for me. When I told the note-taking story to Mike Brennan, who leads the ITMS Chicago Chapter, he said, “So, you were actually the first ITMS secretary.” I hadn’t thought of it that way!)

Bob had strong opinions and could be prickly toward others in getting his way. He was determined that the *Seasonal* (and, later, *The Merton Annual*) was appropriately “dressed for success.” In 1987, when there was some push-back to Bob’s vision from a couple of the various stake-holders about the layout of the inaugural issue of the *Annual*, Bob wrote to me: “[I] prefer the crisp, clean, modern, dressed-for-success CHELMSFORD typeface in which it is being set (by me, of course),” rather than “a typeface developed no later than fifty years after Gutenberg to maintain that scholarly, old look . . . which I don’t [like]. . . . If not, someone else will have to do the work.” They reached “a compromise,” as he called it. Volume 1 was set in CHELMSFORD. (Chelmsford looks a lot like Helvetica which I’m using here.) But nothing lasts forever and, alas, the two publications are no longer “dressed-for-success” in CHELMSFORD.

I could go on and on about Bob, and perhaps I will in another setting, but space is limited here. Bob Daggy was a mentor and friend to so many people, inside and outside the field of Merton studies. I was blessed to have been one of them.

Gregory Ryan

1. Michael Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984).

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When thinking of Bob Daggy, two things immediately come to my mind: his facilitation of Merton scholarship and his sense of fun.

Very few scholars who were working seriously on Merton in the first fifteen years or so after his death would have progressed smoothly without Bob’s help. I am a case in point. Having in 1977 decided to write a doctoral dissertation on Merton (“WHO?” my friends asked), I wrote to Bob in February 1978, four years after he became Associate Director of the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine. I must have asked for bibliography because Bob’s response (in retrospect, hilarious) was, “It is impossible to send you our catalogue without mailing a piece of furniture” (letter of 2/28/1978). In April 1978, Bob read my dissertation proposal, corrected its title, took exception to its conclusion, and signed up a poor graduate student for a free subscription to *The Merton Seasonal*.

In 1979, in ways not fit for publication, he became perhaps the first to know the carefully kept secret of my engagement to be married. And so began a rollicking friendship which grew ever more so until his death in 1997. For some reason, our 1980s letters were hilarious (see below). I still miss him – and his extraordinary neckties.

Dr. Daggy's academic credentials were impeccable: Yale, Columbia, University of Wisconsin, Madison. The 1986 Breit-Daggy Merton bibliography already lists 30-some Daggy entries.¹ The 2000 Breit-Burton-Pearson bibliography² adds about fifty more, with its successor adding a final few.³ A complete bibliography in the memorial volume *The Vision of Thomas Merton* includes an astonishing 154 items in all categories.⁴ He was a consummate and careful editor of Merton's work: journals (volume 5 of the complete journals,⁵ along with *Thomas Merton in Alaska*,⁶ one of the most important volumes for Merton's mature views on prayer and on Islam); a volume of letters (*The Road to Joy*⁷); appropriately to his own background in the study of oriental cultures, *Honorable Reader*⁸ (Merton's introductions to works translated into Eastern – and Western – languages); and the *Encounter* of D. T. Suzuki and Merton.⁹ All this was produced while directing the work of the Merton Center at Bellarmine, assisting who-knows-how-many Merton scholars in the US and abroad, and being a key player in the founding of the International Thomas Merton Society, of which he was the second president (1989-91) and resident secretary for the society's first decade.

And therein is another example of his sense of fun. About 1987 Dr. Christine Bochen, Bob Daggy and I were summoned by Bill Shannon (also of blessed memory) to Rochester, NY to work toward a Merton gathering and the founding of the Society. *I know* we were then, and thereafter often, lavishly hosted by the Sisters of St. Joseph at Nazareth College (without whom the ITMS would not exist). We'd worked diligently all day and gathered in Bill Shannon's apartment after dinner for a drink and conversation in the course of which Bob and I discovered we'd been raised in the same non-denominational church and that his aunt attended my husband's (see above) student parish. Thereafter Bob and I "treated" our stunned friends and fellow scholars to a concert of hymns in two part harmony . . . when we could stop laughing.

Once upon another time, returning from another Rochester meeting, we made a detour to Niagara Falls because I'd never been there. In the gift shop Bob added to his extensive collection of vegetable china. In a serious letter about *Merton Annual I* he made unrepeatabe remarks about me jogging in a pink sweat-suit, and reported, "The pumpkin mugs finally arrived from Lillian Vernon" (11/17/1987).

Among the many "characters" who have and do populate the Merton "family" (to which we all belong) Bob Daggy is pre-eminent, and, to allude to Shakespeare, "we shall not see his like again." Alas.



Robert E. Daggy (1940-1997)



Daggy Crockery

Bonnie Thurston

1. Marquita E. Breit and Robert E. Daggy, eds., *Thomas Merton: A Comprehensive Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1986).
2. Marquita E. Breit, Patricia A. Burton and Paul M. Pearson, eds., *'about Merton': Secondary Sources 1945-2000* (Louisville, KY: Thomas Merton Foundation, 2002).
3. Patricia A. Burton, ed., *'about Merton': Secondary Sources 2000-2015* (Louisville, KY: Thomas Merton Center, 2015).
4. Patrick F. O'Connell, ed., *The Vision of Thomas Merton* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2003) 224-32.
5. Thomas Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life: Seeking Peace in the Hermitage. Journals, vol. 5: 1963-1965*, ed. Robert E. Daggy (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997).
6. *Thomas Merton in Alaska: The Alaskan Conferences, Journals, and Letters*, ed. Robert E. Daggy (New York: New Directions, 1989).
7. Thomas Merton, *The Road to Joy: Letters to New and Old Friends*, ed. Robert E. Daggy (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1989).
8. Thomas Merton, *"Honorable Reader": Reflections on My Work*, ed. Robert E. Daggy (New York: Crossroad, 1989).
9. *Encounter: Thomas Merton and D. T. Suzuki*, ed. Robert E. Daggy (Monterey, KY: Larkspur Press, 1988).