

My Friend David — Danny Sullivan

At the first Winchester conference in December 1993, David had extended an invitation to Crispian Hollis, the Catholic Bishop of Portsmouth, but he was unable to attend. I worked for Crispian at that time and he dropped me a note asking if I'd like to go in his place as he knew of my interest in Merton's life and writings. Somehow I left the conference as editor of the planned Merton Journal.

From the start David wanted the Journal to have a poetry section and that has been maintained ever since. It also led to the marvellous poetry readings at Merton Conferences with David himself, Pádraig Daly, Michael Woodward and on one occasion, thanks to David, Selima Hill. As I look back at those early days of the Society I realise that David should have been poetry editor of the Journal but he never once suggested it or indeed tried to advise me. His natural humility seemed to preclude him from doing so.

You only needed to meet David once to recognise his quiet spiritual presence, and for me it has been the greatest privilege to have been his friend from those early beginnings of the Society until his death. The committee of the Society met at David and Miggy's home in Winchester and it was always a delightful occasion with their warm hospitality, the very essence of who they were.

When, through the Buddhist monk the Ven Sobhano, we explored Buddhist-Christian retreat days at the Amaravati Buddhist Monastery in Hertfordshire, David was gently encouraging and a wise counsel. There was something special about those gatherings marked as they were by silence and meditation. And perhaps only David could lead such reflective silences with integrity.

I love David's poetry but two of his books resonate very deeply with me. *The Private Prayers of Lancelot Andrewes* is a gem, both in its translations and in its accessibility. I believe David did a great deal in reintroducing the Anglican Church to its mystical traditions. The other book is *Moments of Prayer: Prayer and Pastoral Visiting*. In this David lays the foundations for priestly ministry and especially pastoral visiting which, certainly in the Roman Catholic Church, seems to have been lost altogether. It is telling that in his care home one of the things that stayed within David despite his Alzheimer's was a pastoral awareness. Staff would say they knew if someone wasn't quite right as they'd find David sitting beside them.

I have two treasured memories of David since his diagnosis with early onset Alzheimer's. One was when Miggy brought him to his former parish in Winchester for a lecture in his honour. Afterwards I offered to sit with David while Miggy mingled. He seemed to recognise my name and we had a little chat. Then he looked at me and asked, 'How do I know you, Danny?' I replied, 'The Merton Society', and his face lit up and he said: 'Ah yes, The Merton Society.' The second was after I sent him, when he could still read, a biography of David Jones the engraver and artist. Miggy contacted me to say he loved the book and insisted on writing to me to thank me but alerted me to how the letter might be jumbled. It was indeed jumbled but the kindness and affection behind it deeply moved me.

You couldn't know David and not know Miggy, a real spirit and gifted person in her own right. The funeral (and the wake afterwards) that she and their children Adam and Lucy planned for David made it the most joyful of occasions. It reflected the David we knew and loved, the poet, the writer, the husband and father, but most of all the profoundly spiritual and warm human being.

As a Native American saying puts it: Some people come into our lives and quickly pass. Other leave footprints in our hearts and our lives are never ever the same again.

Danny Sullivan is a former chair of the Thomas Merton Society and currently a member of it.