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A Portrait of Brother Dunstan Bowles, CSC

by

Brother Gerald Muller, CSC

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Brother Dunstan Bowles was the finest dramatist the Congregation of Holy Cross has ever produced. By the time he celebrated his Silver Jubilee of religious profession he had written, directed and produced no less than 25 plays. His dramas were performed in practically every high school run by the Brothers in the United States yet not one of his manuscripts was ever published. His body of work included three-act and one-act plays as well as four full-length musicals. His most successful plays were *American Living Room*, *Strangers in Our Midst*, *It Happened Here*, *Passport to Heaven* and *Great Aunt Trilby*. His musicals were comedies: *Stars Over Hollycrest*, *If Jack Were only Here*, *The Princess of Tallenburg* and *Go, Mac, Go*--a satirical take on Shakespeare's *Macbeth* that filled the gymnasium of Notre Dame High School, Sherman Oaks, California, with standing-room-only audiences of 1000 for six evenings in a row. Shana Alexander then working for LIFE magazine brought photographers and reporters to do a story on the extravaganza. An entire evening was spent shooting scenes over and over for the article. Unfortunately, the material was never used because of fast-breaking news stories of the time. Dunstan wrote a touching letter to Ms Alexander asking for a few prints of the LIFE pictures. He would keep them as mementos of his wondrous production. "The people who had done the story for LIFE were as disappointed as we were," he lamented. (1)

Who was this extraordinary man? He was born Richard Chandler Bowles on September 13, 1914 in Chicago, Illinois to William Bowles, an Englishman, and Alice Cleary, an Irish lady. In old age he was a short, spare, graying man with prominent eyes and a short goatee that he stroked habitually while clearing his throat as he pondered some profound insight he wanted to share with others. As a Brother of Holy Cross he was famous for his dramas and dramatics, talents and tantrums, humor and humility and boundless love for God and God's children. He was five-and-a-half feet tall and weighed 150 pounds but his diminutive size was deceptive because his energy, exuberance and excess of talent made him in many ways larger than life. This

manic mystic impressed people and places so powerfully during his 82 years of life on earth that after his death in 1996, he is remembered with fondness, admiration and, best of all, humor.

"My dad," Dunstan once recalled, "died when I was seven years old but I still remember him reciting many different selections. He also did a lot of singing. He had a free and easy attitude toward everything. There was not a beggar that came to our door who did not sit down to our table. 'Beggars are just nice people we've never met,' he used to say. And recently in going through old papers my sister, Margaret, found Dad's Socialist card. He belonged to the Socialist Party back in the early 1900's. He was a somewhat radical person--but not radical in the sense of being a fanatic. He was a Christian radical and a very, very good man." He was also a railroad engineer making runs to St. Paul and Milwaukee for two days at a time. "My mother ruled the roost, then," Dunstan remembered. "She was a tiny Irish lady, a very hard-working person with a tre-MEN-dous sense of humor. After my father died of heart trouble, she opened a grocery store to support my three older sisters and myself." (2)

Concerning school, Richard's opinion was quite emphatic: "I never liked it! I couldn't stand the place, so I entertained my classmates." As a result, he washed many blackboards as punishment for his entertainment activities. He attended Morris Elementary School just across the street from his childhood home. "My mother," he remembered, "bribed the teachers with homemade lemon pies to get me from kindergarten to first grade." Ironical because Richard as Brother Dunstan would spend almost his entire adult life teaching in Holy Cross Brothers' schools of the United States, in public institutions of Australia and finally on US Navy ships circumnavigating the globe. He graduated from St. Cyprian's Elementary School in 1930 and then became an average student in Oak Park High School living in the shadow of his older sister, Margaret, who was a brilliant student. He even used some of her old essays as his own for English composition assignments, got caught and suffered memorable consequences. Ernest Hemingway had attended Oak Park High School a few years ahead of Richard Bowles. "He wrote English," Dunstan once said, "and I taught it. He graduated with honors and I graduated in the principal's office--alone. He committed suicide and I'm still alive!"

On one occasion Phil Donahue of television fame revealed that as a student at St. Edward's High School in Lakewood, Ohio, he had acted in *An American Living Room*.

"When my sister called me excitedly to tell me Donahue had mentioned this on television, I simply said: 'I wrote that.'" Richard graduated from high school in 1934 and went to work for an advertising company and a "cheap-skate" butcher. He learned to dance to the music of Wayne King and sing like Rudy Vallee. He went to night school to study typing and psychology. He even formed a "fraternity" with a friend to help the "poor, the ugly and the downtrodden" who decided not to attend college.

In August, 1935, Richard Bowles, not yet 21 years of age, was invited to Watertown, Wisconsin, to begin training as a Brother of Holy Cross. The invitation to join Holy Cross came from Brother Ephrem O'Dwyer, a dour and demanding man whose will was not easily disobeyed and who would one day be Provincial of the Brothers for the entire country. Richard's stay in Watertown's postulancy program was only of five months' duration and during that time, he managed to entertain the other postulants by tap dancing at some of their recreations while Brother Arnold Reickert, his prefect, played the piano. On February 1, 1936, he put on the black habit of a Brother of Holy Cross in the new novitiate building at Rolling Prairie, Indiana. He was told to "put off the old man and put on the new" in the words of St. Paul and so he took a new name: Brother Dunstan. Seminarian Theodore Hesburgh was a fellow-novice with Dunstan who would remember: "We hacked down trees, pulled weeds and were 'put in our places' by such wonderful people as Father Kerndt Healy and Brother Seraphim." Hesburgh went on to become priest-president of Notre Dame while Dunstan led a less exalted but no less exciting life.

Following his first profession of vows on February 2, 1937, Brother Dunstan enrolled in classes at the University of Notre Dame. He studied English, history, Latin, physical education and public speaking--the class he liked the best. After two years he was sent to Central Catholic High School in South Bend, Indiana, to begin his teaching career. That year proved to be the most painful of his life. He lived in Columba Hall on the Notre Dame campus with other faculty members and was driven across town to the high school every morning and afternoon. After a few days in the classroom where discipline was in complete chaos, beginning-teacher Dunstan decided to walk back to campus each afternoon. "That first semester was HELL on earth," he admitted. "I never knew from day to day what was going to happen. And it became such a crucifixion that the moment the bell rang, I was the first one out of the building. I walked back to Notre Dame and I needed that walk to regain and recollect myself. At the end of that dreadful

semester, I made up my mind, a little bit like Scarlett O'Hara, that it would never happen to me again, no matter what came--I would beg, steal, murder, kill--anything, but it would not happen and it never did. I had learned my lesson as a teacher." He survived the school year and later mentored beginning teachers among the Brothers by sharing his expertise of crowd-control with uninitiated eager new men entering the ranks. He spent the following summer at Gilbault Boys Home and taught for two years at Cathedral High school in Indianapolis.

His philosophy of education was based on common sense and faith in God. Here is some of his advice to parents of teen-age boys: "Your sons are like the boys of every day and age. They have the same strengths, the same weaknesses that are found in human nature through the ages. Ours is, perhaps, more complicated than any of those that have gone before but the graces of God are always equal to any given battle... Our hope lies in the things of the soul and the things of God. If you would have your sons meet and beat the challenge(s) of the day, you must teach them to be boys of prayer--you must teach them to live by the Spirit. You must lead them by the example within your own home to the source of knowledge, goodness, truth and beauty and this is a life ultimately aware of the reality of God." (3)

Brother Dunstan made his final vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in 1940, earned a bachelor's degree from Notre Dame in 1942 and a master's degree from the same university in 1947. He did additional graduate work during summer classes at Immaculate Heart College, Los Angeles; Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois; Catholic University, Washington, D.C. and the University of Wisconsin in Whitewater, Wisconsin. Thanks to Holy Cross he found himself a well-educated man and ready for years of teaching, writing and directing plays. To prepare himself for acting, he took summer drama classes at Immaculate Heart College and got into trouble with the provincial for creating the character of a married man with a wife and baby. The scene called for Dunstan in full costume and makeup to push a baby carriage across the stage at his "wife's" side while carrying on dialogue. In those ancient days to be out of the holy habit and dressed in secular clothes pretending to be the father of a family was considered scandalous. But Dunstan played his role well and laughed off the criticism of his superior. "I started dreaming of being in the theatre in my childhood," he once admitted. 'Ever since the days of the silent movies when I sat enthralled before Fairbanks, Sr., and Valentino and watched Pola Negri rip the dress off her back. I

knew this was the life for me. Acting is a part of my nature. It is part of my personality. I act when I have to act and I pour the intensity of myself into whatever I'm doing and let the chips fall where they may. I am no longer bothered by that problem. 'I am what I am' as Popeye says." (4) He won rave reviews for his performance as "Candy" in Steinbeck's dramatized novel *Of Mice and Men*, "Ishmael" in *Moby Dick Rehearsed* and took the title role of "Pope Formosus" in Joseph Dispenza's play, *The Death and Trial of Pope Formosus*, the story of a ninth century pope's demise. Costumes, sets and properties for the play were created by Michael Tracy, now a world-renowned artist. The play was filmed for Texas television but rejected by the World University Theatre Festival for performance in Nancy, France. He also made appearances as an extra on the national television programs: *Beauty and the Beast* (two episodes), *30 Something* and *Dead End Brattigan*. The pay for each day's work was \$40 which Dunstan found "pretty good!" In whatever role he found himself, Dunstan threw his entire personality and energy into living the part. "I come off stage completely drained. I gave everything I had to it." He was always in dread of forgetting his lines. Yet his reviews for each performance were stunning: He "embarrasses superlatives," wrote one critic. "Thoroughly professional, his interpretation....squeezes out every painful ounce of a lonely man's existence." "I am not indulging in histrionics, he admitted, "when I say that the performances drained me completely of my surplus of energy."

Out of 33 one-act plays performed at the prestigious Pasadena Playhouse in the 1950's, Dunstan's "Without the Light" won first prize and a scholarship for its leading man. (5) Yet over the years two well-known publishing houses rejected all of his requests to print and market his manuscripts.

Dunstan's California teaching career commenced in 1941 at St. Anthony High School, Long Beach, where he taught Latin, English, religion, history, speech and drama. He wrote a *History of the Catholic Church in Long Beach* from its beginnings until 1942. This was published but not distributed for some reason. With a companion, Leo Miller, he once climbed Mt. Whitney with a 90-pound pack on his back. "It was a tre-MEN-dous experience," he said, "one of the experiences of my life. You stand on Mt. Whitney, the highest point in the United States and look down on the borax fields of Death Valley, the lowest point in the country." Back at sea level and in school he oversaw the production of nine prize-winning yearbooks and from 1942 until 1951 he wrote the lives of saints for children for Dujarie Press as well as several plays. His first

comedy was *Stars Over Hollycrest*, a musical with lyrics by Dunstan to tunes of old songs and a plot developed after a winter outing in the mountains with senior students. 20th Century Fox Studio executives had promised Dunstan the use of numerous costumes for the show. Two days before the opening, they informed him that the costumes would not be available because of a change in shooting schedules at the studio. Dunstan suffered the first of what would be many panic-attacks and was rescued by Brother Eagan Hunter who suggested calling Mrs Eddie Shipsted. This generous lady, who produced the Ice Follies of Shipsted and Johnson, consented to ship all of the costumes Dunstan needed from a warehouse in San Francisco. A large truck disgorged them in Long Beach in plenty of time for the opening of the show. But since most of the costumes were for women ice skaters with narrow shoulders and broad hips, Dunstan summoned mothers of students to sew ribbons on the open backs for the shoulders of brawny football players--some of whom weighed 250 pounds--who had to appear as graceful ballerinas in full costumes, makeup and wigs. After *Stars Over Hollycrest* closed to rave reviews, Mrs. Shipsted made a gift of the costumes to the delighted director. He had a gift for getting what he wanted and keeping it--always for the good of others. For example, Ruby Keeler, star of the film, *Forty Second Street*, sometimes helped him choreograph his musicals. Choreographer Hermes Pan also assisted him on occasion after designing dances for film stars, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. Ann Blyth who appeared in movies with Mario Lanza and Gregory Peck served as makeup artist when needed and later sent her son to Notre Dame High School. He befriended Jerry Colonna, Bob Hope's long-time comic side-kick, and also Louise Fazenda, silent movie comedienne and wife of producer Hal Wallis. Her lavish home near Notre Dame High School provided a swimming pool in summer for the Brothers and once Brother Dunstan suggested the wild idea of buying her house for a trifling \$50,000 and converting it into a postulate for the Brothers of Holy Cross. Naturally, his superiors ignored the idea because they had neither the cash nor conviction for such a transaction.

The entire gymnasium of Notre Dame High School was transformed for Dunstan's production of *Go, Mac, Go*. Brother Richard Daly, then a sophomore and recent school enrollee from Chicago, wanted to get involved with student activities and make new friends so he signed on for the show's stage crew. One of his duties on crew was to help extend the stage which was totally inadequate for Dunstan's grandiose schemes.

Under cover of darkness crew members were sent to piles of lumber meant to be used in the construction of a new classroom building on campus and return to the gym with many two-by-fours and large planks. These were used not only for the thrust stage which reached half-way across the gym floor but for a high, heavy catwalk at the rear of the stage. There was no budget for the production so what was the director-producer to do? No one outsmarted Dunstan when it came to making real the design hatched in his creative brain. When it was time to hang the mammoth spider web that covered the entire ceiling of the gym with an enormous black, eye-blinking spider in the center, Richard was ordered to the top of a swaying ladder to attach the thing to the rafters. The poor sophomore, who was always afraid of heights, not only scaled the top of the domed ceiling but moved precariously on top of the ladder while students many feet below pushed the contraction around the floor hoping its occupant would not fall to his death. The task completed, Richard descended safely to the floor sweating profusely. On another occasion Dunstan asked Richard if he had a car. "Of course I did," Richard remembers. "Even newly transplanted Southern California teenagers had to have wheels. He asked me to drive him to Culver City to get some props. Little did I know we were going to the back lot of 20th Century Fox. We drove through the gate--everyone knew Dunstan--and over to a huge property warehouse. We walked through the place with some high-ranking studio official and Dunstan simply pointed out various costumes, props, sound effects equipment etc. that he needed for the play. Sure enough. A few days later a 20th Century Fox truck pulled on the campus and we unloaded all of the stuff that Dunstan had requested."

The two-and-one-half hour extravaganza included mob scenes with huge boiling cauldrons, moving forests, realistic sword fights and endless songs, dances and skits. Studio technicians came from Hollywood to see how the director had lighted his show so stunning were some of its effects. And all he had at his disposal were used number ten cans with light bulbs inside covered with gels. With a cast of 250 and a large crew, the production involved almost the entire student population for a full semester. Rehearsals were raucous affairs with loud verbal disagreements concerning the music and staging between the drama director and the band director, Brother Eugenio Cassano, of happy memory. On one occasion, Dunstan, furious at how things were NOT happening to his specifications on stage, ran from the rear of the gym to the front, leaped onto the stage in a frenzy and broke his ankle. After that he appeared

more subdued at rehearsals with his damaged limb in a cast. It was not uncommon to hear coming over the school's inter-com: "Would all the 'witches' please go to the gym for rehearsal now!" Of course half of each classroom emptied whether the students were "witches" or not and it mattered little that they might be in the midst of taking an exam. The play came first. All else was secondary as far as the director was concerned.

It was during his Long Beach years that Dunstan began to paint with oils. His canvases were large and crude at first but he improved with practice. One picture was eight feet high and four feet wide depicting Christ as Divine Mercy. He gave it to a cleaning woman who mounted it in her small parlor like an elephant in a bathtub. Another painted in 1963 depicted a beautiful young woman in a strapless evening gown. It got Dunstan into trouble with a woman who thought the subject in a dress with bare shoulders was a scandal to lust-filled young male viewers. Dunstan was unconcerned. He was known to clean his brushes at 2 a.m. in the morning on the white athletic socks of his roommate who then had to wear them flashing with bright colors under his black habit to school later in the day.

A story is told about Dunstan during his California years. It seems the Brothers had attended a wake and were driving back to their residence when they passed a pet cemetery. In California such burial grounds are commonplace. Dunstan told the driver: "Please stop the car." He opened the door, stepped out into the darkness while the Brothers waited and wondered what this was all about. After a few minutes, Dunstan returned and explained: "That makes us even. I just did what some dog will do to my grave when I'm dead!"

In the late 1940's Dunstan became obsessed with the desire to become a Trappist monk so in 1949 he went to Huntsville, Utah, to make a retreat with them at their Abbey of Our Lady of the Holy Trinity. He planned to leave the Brothers of Holy Cross and join the Trappists permanently the following summer but was warned ahead of time by Abbot Maurice Lans: "I do not like so very much the idea of coming to a monastery just with the idea of seeing if perchance you may like the life. We prefer to see souls coming in with a determination. This latter is very probably a sign of a true call, the former is not. Our lay brothers are not a teaching body. They take care of farm work and the dairy, go out early in the morning milking cows. You seem eminently fitted by God for the work you are doing in your Congregation and what a change it would be to

embrace the Trappist life!" (6)

The Abbot's words proved prophetic. Dunstan's stay in the monastery of silent and strict observance was a disaster. "I expected," he explained, "that the great peace and quiet I had known frequently in prayer would be with me there. Instead, there was a great sense of unrest. I looked around that monastery and said to myself: These men are all at peace because they are doing what they are supposed to be doing. I had as much peace as they had when I was telling students to pick up paper, sit down and do their homework. I may have been in a state of outward confusion but inside there was quiet and piece. I decided that my place was back where I came from. I returned to Holy Cross and have never regretted it for a moment since." Months before his attempt to live the Trappist life Dunstan received a letter from his Provincial, Brother Ephrem: "Your life and work in Holy Cross has been very successful. You have the ability and personality to teach; you have good influence among boys and your apostolate is appreciated among faculty and students. By nature your type leans towards the extrovert, blessed with the disposition to plan and do things for youngsters. I personally cannot conceive (of) you in any other atmosphere. You have talents over and above common teaching; your ability in dramatics, both in writing and preparing plays, is known all over the Community. In this field we had great hopes for you and for the advantages that might accrue to Holy Cross. As you might be able to guess, we were but awaiting an auditorium in one of our property schools to give you added opportunity in this direction, for we know that your special talent is not fully appreciated where you are." (7) The irony is that when Dunstan *did* make plans to build just such a theatre on the campus of Notre Dame High School in Sherman Oaks, Brother Ephrem forbade him to do so in a three-sentence note: he had done a good job teaching; he would teach in Indianapolis the following year; he would do as good a job there as he had done in other schools. It was a crushing blow because he had drawn up floor plans and begun sounding out wealthy donors to pay for its construction. With the demise of the project, Brother Dunstan found himself next to Brother Ephrem on the same plane flying from Los Angeles to Chicago. A wall of silence separated them and for hours of flight they exchanged not one word.

From the autumn of 1957 until 1961 Brother Dunstan lived in Austin, Texas, teaching classes at St. Edward's High School, writing and directing student plays and producing annual yearbooks. During those years he also served as Director of Holy

Cross Brother postulants who repaired and painted Sorin Hall on the campus for their living quarters. For the Silver Anniversary of the National Catholic Theatre Conference, he edited a 64-page program complete with full-color cover created by Brother Hilarion Brezik who years before had helped him design and paint stage settings. He wrote a four-page poem honoring the Holy Trinity to close the publication. He had so many classes to prepare, papers to correct and conferences to give that his boundless energy was heavily taxed. But he always had time for those who came to him for advice, spiritual direction or just a friendly chat. Even after his return to Holy Cross he continued thinking of one day joining the Trappists. It was an ideal and dream he treasured but never realized. He became a deeply contemplative person, a man of prayer with profound spiritual insights.

The free spirit of this man was evidenced at a house meeting of the Brothers when it was announced that the tools of the Brother in charge of maintenance were missing. Brother Dunstan of course had walked off with the tool box and told no one of his action--he simply needed them at the time and would return them when finished which could encompass several months' time. "How much are those tools worth?" Dunstan asked angrily. "Fifty bucks!" came the reply. "Am I not worth FIFTY BUCKS?" he shouted and stalked out of the room.

August of 1965 found Dunstan aboard the SS MAASDAM making a six-day voyage across the Atlantic to Europe. He had asked for a year off to study painting in Rome but instead found himself assigned to one year of teaching classes in the Notre Dame International School. No matter. He planned to take full advantage of this wonderful opportunity by visiting Ireland, England and Holland in route. He spent a week visiting a cousin in Ireland, saw a production of *Hamlet* in Stratford-on-Avon, Shakespeare's birth and burial place, saw priceless Rembrandt paintings in Amsterdam and arrived in the Eternal City on September 3. His work-load included classes in English literature, creative writing and religion. He moderated the school newspaper, edited two yearbooks and prefectured 25-30 boarding students each evening. His students were sons of English-speaking diplomats and famous movie stars and some Italian students from the neighborhood. Vatican Council II was then in progress and Dunstan wanted to start a snack bar concession in St. Peter's basilica! "I understand that some of the most important work (of the Council) is done over snacks," he wrote, "and I have a few ideas I would like to get across... Now's the time to get the Pope squared

away on a few choice items." (8) His snack bar apostolate never materialized.

The year in Rome provided him with the opportunity to meet Dorothy Day. "I told her that I came from St. Edward's University. Her face brightened up and she said, 'Oh, yes, I remember Saint Edward's well. I was much impressed with the students there (who) were working with the mentally retarded and I remember some of them talking about going down to Mexico to work with the poor. And there was something about your faculty and some of the students who had gone into Austin to make a quiet protest against discrimination. Yes, I remember Saint Edward's.'" (9) Dunstan agreed with Dorothy Day in her opposition to the war in Vietnam and wrote a poem to honor young Americans killed in the conflict-- six of his former students among them.

During Easter vacation of 1966 Dunstan visited the Isle of Capri, Pompei, Naples and other cities in southern Italy. He spent a week at Lourdes in southern France praying and watching the countless pilgrims entering the frigid baths of miraculous spring water discovered by St. Bernadette at the behest of the Blessed Virgin. And then he made plans to spend six weeks of the summer in Tunisia. He was led to believe that he would be teaching English classes in the University of Tunisia in Tunis. Much to his chagrin, he discovered that those who had invited him really did not expect him to come and so he ended up in the Tunis-Hilton Hotel teaching employees how to deal with tourists in his half-English and terrible French. They didn't understand him and he didn't understand them. The result was a total educational fiasco for which he received board and room and no financial remuneration whatever. At least Dunstan got to Africa for a few weeks and then headed for home and more employment in Austin, Texas.

The fall of 1966 found Dunstan teaching classes at St. Edward's University and prefecting students for a time in Holy Cross Hall. "I was removed from the job of prefecting because I was too easy on the students," he lamented. "I let the guys who had come back to school after fighting in the Vietnam war go out after 9:00 p.m.--a beer after an evening of study never hurt anyone was my philosophy. The Head Master of the Hall saw it differently." (10)

During a lecture on two plays by Tennessee Williams, he confused characters and plots of *Glass Menagerie* and *Streetcar Named Desire*. According to then student, John McCann, the class broke into loud laughter and Dunstan joined them good-naturedly. "His incisive analysis of what's core to each of the dramas" was brilliant,

according to McCann and he was so impressed by what he learned about Tennessee Williams that he later wrote a 430-page book about the playwright's work: *The Critical Reputation of Tennessee Williams*. "In showing us how genuinely to read a literary work," McCann continued, "he took theoretical problems from our philosophy classes or our theology classes or our physics classes and enfolded them.... He taught us to use our intellects as far as they'd go with a work of literature and then how to leave intellect behind, without fear. He taught us how to feel, how to parse compassion."

Twice a week Dunstan volunteered to help mentally challenged men at Travis State School. Since he never learned to drive, a student and friend, Richard Halpin, agreed to chauffeur him to and from the school several miles east of the city. Dunstan taught drawing, music and theatre. Some of the pictures produced by the boys are still extant and beautiful. He wrote plays for his disadvantaged youths--aged 12 to 90. The first was *King of the Road* performed in an outdoor pavilion at the school, on campus at St. Edward's University and later filmed for educational television. Dunstan challenged his clients and they responded magnificently. Richard Halpin recalls sitting in back of a rehearsal hall watching Dunstan patiently at work with his cast. Near him sat a boy whom everyone called "Radio". For years that no one had bothered to count, "Radio" had not spoken one word to anyone. Some terrible trauma had apparently struck him mute when he was very young silencing him for years. Yet all during rehearsals he would sit quietly out of sight listening and mimicking every movement Dunstan made. When the production was ready for public scrutiny, the entire company of 25 headed for Lubbock, Texas. The curtain opened on the first act and out stepped the well-rehearsed soloist to sing the opening number. Suddenly out from the wings strolled "Radio", pushed his rival aside and SANG the entire song perfectly! Dunstan was dumbfounded. So was Richard. Nor was that the end of the episode. "Radio" stayed on stage with the cast and sang every song in the show. After that he spoke fluently and was soon released from the Travis State School. Halpin was so impressed by this "miracle" that he initiated a class-action suit for a Least Restrictive Environment for mentally challenged people. The case dragged on in the courts for sixteen years and in the meantime Richard founded the American Institute for Learning to help drop-outs and non-traditional students earn a graduate equivalency diploma. His institute has now spread to six states with an annual budget of six million dollars!

Brother Dunstan always had a deep sense of fair-play and social justice before such

things were politically correct. During the seething sixties when the civil rights struggle swept through the South, he marched in downtown parades on behalf of African-Americans and joined sit-ins at stores that refused service at lunch counters because of racial hatred. He commiserated with farm workers trying to unionize in the fields near the Rio Grande River. He crocheted shawls and caps and afghans for young and old, built a tree house that was briefly occupied by Richard Halpin who had no place else to lay his head. He built a beautiful sculpture garden and made a large, horrendous crucifix from scrap metal. He painted endlessly, sculpted, wrote poetry, read widely and prayed much. And then in 1969 he entered a controversy that would change his life.

From its founding in 1885 until 1969 St. Edward's University did not have a theatre auditorium. Theatrical performances took place in the barn-like high school gymnasium, the claustrophobic "Tombs" of Holy Cross Hall, Dunstan's fire ant-infested shack on a hill and the atrium of Moody Hall, a classroom building. Then in 1969 a grant of \$200,000 from the Moody Foundation made a theatre building possible. The question was: What kind of theatre? Would it have a proscenium, thrust or arena-type stage? Brother Dunstan was a faculty member of the Department of Fine and Performing Arts but was given no role to play during the planning stages for the much needed new theatre. Since he had performed and directed plays during his thirteen years of teaching at St. Edward's he felt he should be allowed some input and suggestions. Nothing was proffered.

He did extensive research on both an arena and thrust stage. He knew a proscenium stage was out of the question because of cost. Yet that would have been the ideal floor plan for the proposed building. He knew the arena or theatre-in-the-round had physical limitations. Edward Mangum, then head of the drama department, was a pioneer in bringing this type of theatre to the United States. Such a theatre cost less, needed less trained actors, used simple settings and called for naturalness of movement and voice since the audience was seated above the players on all four sides. Dunstan was convinced the best type of theatre for St. Edward's drama students was the thrust stage with audience seated in a semi-circle on three sides. The clash of conflicting ideas was inevitable.

Articles Dunstan wrote for the student newspaper detailing his rationale for a theatre of his design were rejected. The final decision to build an arena theatre was made in

December, 1970. After failing to have his plan even considered Brother Dunstan gave up the fight and resigned from his teaching position at the university. "It was strange," he remembered, "because in ONE sentence I wrote off 13 years of service, gave back the security of tenure, saw the end of what I had begun to think of as my future and even my future future. I do not deny that deep within me I felt the awful human pain of one regret: I will leave my present students. I have never had students in any class anywhere at any time that I have not come to love with that single love which is my human right and Christly preoccupation." (11)

A dejected Dunstan decided not only to leave the university but also the country. In late January, 1971, he flew 9000 miles across the Pacific Ocean to Australia. After a week of orientation in Sydney, a metropolis on the south-east coast of the country, he was assigned to teaching high school students including seven aborigines in Condobolin, a town of 3800 some 285 miles north-west of Sydney. There was no Holy Cross presence in the entire country, so Dunstan had to find his own living quarters and eventually formed a community with two other teachers who joined him in sharing living expenses. He invited other Holy Cross Brothers to join him but only one responded: John Vogelmann. There was no language barrier for teachers. Salaries were generous and paid by the government. Teachers were in short supply, especially for the small towns in the "bush" and "out-back".

He decided to drop the title, "Brother", and be known simply as Mr. Dunstan R. Bowles. "It is better that way," he wrote, "though I walk to Mass about four blocks each morning. It would cramp the style of these people if I hit them with the Brother bit." (12) He found the Catholic Church there living in the 1930's with hymns from the 1890's. His new world was dominated by men who found it difficult to admit a mistake and who needed a good dose of up-dating and unity. One of his attempts at ecumenism took place on a 4th of July when he invited 150 guests to his house for a sumptuous, inexpensive meal amid red-white-and-blue decorations. He brought together people who had never been in the same room before: a priest, an Anglican minister, a Methodist "bearded-guitar-playing" minister, a Presbyterian minister, the aboriginal mailman, the town bankers and the local newspaper editor. It was a memorable evening.

Dunstan lost little time forming an amateur theatrical society in Condobolin. He convinced fellow teachers to join him in producing *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, a

hit play and later a movie by a native Australian. The success of that venture was so great that plans were made with the help of town leaders to renovate an old hotel and convert it into a community center complete with theatre. Cost of the renovation for the stage was a mere \$1000 and one production of the new company brought in \$800 to cover more than half that amount. His reputation as a successful play-producer was enhanced by his public speaking ability. He continued to paint large canvases fetching as much as \$200 for a single picture. He formed an Art Society for adults some of whom came 60 miles one way to attend classes in painting, pottery and jewelry creation.

After three years of life and work in Condobolin, Dunstan was ready for a change. He found new employment and adventures as a university professor at the Warrnambool Institute of Advanced Education in the State of Victoria, 550 miles south and west of Condobolin. (13) In Warrnambool, a city of 19,000, Dunstan rented a house and for two years continued his successful work in both classroom and theatre. He gave a theatre workshop for primary and high school teachers that was televised and he opened his house and heart to students in need. One student followed him to the Institute from Condobolin. He was poor and stayed with Dunstan for a time. Another was a drop-out and rather erratic. He stayed in the house at no charge and received free counseling from Dunstan because he had difficulty holding a job. A Jewish girl arrived, pregnant, unwed and broke. Dunstan promised to help her financially when she birthed the baby. A man arrested on a drug charge was about to forfeit custody of his four-year-old son. Dunstan made an effective appeal for him because he knew he loved his boy and would take good care of him.

In the closing months of his five-year Australian adventure, Brother Dunstan directed *Skin of Our Teeth* and played the roles of "Heavenly Star Keeper" and "Doctor Seldon" in the musical, *Carousel*. He decided to return to the United States by slow stages. In late December, 1975, he boarded a plane bound for Bangladesh. For six weeks he visited Holy Cross missionaries in that over-populated, poverty-stricken country and was depressed by what he observed. For a few weeks he lectured on Shakespeare's tragedies to 600 elite Moslem and Hindu students in Dacca. "When I began to introduce moral concepts there was almost a freeze," he recalled. "Some of these (Hindu) youngsters have no particular obligation to observe moral standards because they believe that through reincarnation they will perfect themselves

eventually." (14) From Dacca he flew to Nepal to visit Brother John Harris who was teaching with the Jesuits in Katmandu. John also worked with Catholic Relief Services helping refugees. One evening Dunstan was taken to a club frequented by Americans. They met a couple from Elgin, Illinois and began reminiscing. Dunstan's youthful girlfriend, Betty Ripplinger, had been a native of Elgin. When he mentioned her name to his new friends, they gasped in surprise. "I am that woman's minister!" the man exclaimed. Dunstan was as surprised at the coincidence as he was.

In Athens, Greece, Dunstan stayed with friends and fellow teachers he had known in Condobolin. He made a quick trip to the Holy Land and then made his way to Rome for a ten-day pilgrimage. Finally back in the United States, his provincial sent him to teach for a year with the Brothers in Wichita Falls, Texas. That obedience concluded, he made his way to Jefferson, Wisconsin and began work in St. Coletta School where President John F. Kennedy's sister had long resided. He wanted to be near his widowed sister, Margaret, in Chicago and at the same time work with people afflicted with mental retardation. Dunstan's year in Wisconsin was not easy for him and in the summer of 1978, he returned to Austin where he accepted a paid position at the Austin State School. For two years he taught creative dramatics in the recreation department and was named a Therapist Technician Assistant earning \$630 a month.

In August, 1983, Brother Dunstan traveled to El Paso, Texas, to direct his version of *Romeo and Juliet* in the outdoor McKelligon Canyon Amphitheatre. He had been invited to west Texas by his former student, Bill Winkley, "who could sell elephants to people in a two-room apartment" according to Dunstan. The play was to be one of a series called "Shakespeare on the Rocks" and that adequately describes what happened to Dunstan's project. Arriving for the first performance, he found the balcony painted fire-engine red! "It looked like a cross between the best little whorehouse in Verona or a misplaced entrance to a Disney Santa's toy shop," according to the director. He repainted half the piece and "Romeo" in costume finished the job just before show-time. Rain had short-circuited the computer that controlled the lights and costumes were gathered from former productions and attics because the entire production had no budget. A critic's review of the first performance was scathing and Dunstan angrily wrote a five-page rebuttal explaining in great detail the problems plaguing the show from its inception.

In the summer of 1985, Dunstan returned to Sherman Oaks, California, to take up

"creative retirement" with the Brothers at Notre Dame High School. His retirement proved to be anything but that. He visited community houses giving pep talks to older religious on the joys of aging and volunteered for Elderhostel programs. He crocheted sweaters and sent them as gifts to friends. In December he played "Santa Claus" in a trendy mall. "It went well," he remarked. "I was kind to everyone who sat on my lap: old ladies, young ladies, cats and dogs, one monkey and two cockatoos, married couples--one on each knee and children. I refused to take requests for toys of violence, ghetto blasters, drugs! I encouraged Jews and gentiles to say, 'Thank God for Christmas!'" He continued writing plays and pageants, sewed enormous felt banners to decorate the stage for these productions and helped prepare a script for Michael Tracy's "Stations of the Cross" to be dramatized years later near the Rio Grande River of Texas.

And then his life took a dramatic shift when he heard about an exciting program called PACE--Program for Afloat College Education. It was sponsored by the City Colleges of Chicago and provided teachers for college classes on U.S. Navy ships. On January 17, 1986, Brother Dunstan Bowles sailed out of San Diego's harbor on the USS Barbour County for the Far East! Destination: Subic Bay in the Philippines. He was 71 years old and now considered a Functional Skills Instructor in the United States Navy. Here was an aging pacifist who had never served a day of his life in the military sailing the high seas while living in cramped quarters with sailors willing to die for their country. He spent six hours a day teaching reading, writing and English literature. It was not smooth sailing for the new teacher. "The room I taught in was six levels below the main deck," he remembered. "Ventilation was practically non-existent" and the cellar-like classroom reminded him of a Roman galley ship rowed by slaves. The ship paid visits to Hong Kong, Okinawa, Korea, Japan, Singapore and Thailand.

On its return voyage from Thailand to Subic Bay, the USS Barbour County "picked up 32 refugees--16 men, 11 women and 5 children--the youngest 8 months old and the oldest 40." Later that same day they rescued ten young men from a small rowboat. The cruise lasted for six months and was the highlight of Dunstan's life. "Every port has been an adventure for me and the entire cruise has been a learning experience to which no school year in my life can compare." He remembered the stormy night when the chaplain had his nose broken and he himself was tossed from his rack and slid clean across the floor. Morning found the starboard side bulwark torn loose from its

pinnings and the captain asked his slightly damaged passenger: "Well, Dunstan, how did you like THAT adventure?"

His paeon after his latest adventure was "Look to the Sea".

Look to the sea for Me
And to the ever-changing clouds.
See, there I AM WHO AM
In flying fish
And one lone bird
Who dares to fly
Beyond its strength
Beyond familiar land.

Look to the sea
And see the weedy tresses
That I with majesty
Have chosen, choose, and,
Perhaps will ever choose to wear. (15)

Brother Dunstan celebrated his 50th anniversary of religious vows on February 2, 1987 and was given a generous stipend to be used for an extended vacation or as a contribution to those in need. He sent a sizeable donation to Brother John Rozario in Bangladesh to buy food and clothing for the poor people he had once visited. In place of an extended vacation, he signed on for his second cruise the the U.S. Pacific Fleet, this time aboard trhe USS Waddell. It carried the most modern weapons for destroyers of its class including solid fuel surface-to-air guided missiles capable of destroying targets at nearly 2,000 miles an hour. This vessel was capable of causing incredible destruction and there was Dunstan deep in its bowels teaching writing skills and literature!

In the Persian Gulf the Waddell was the first warship to reach the stricken USS Stark after an Iraqi Mirage F-1 fired two Exocet missiles into its port side ripping a 15-foot hole and killing 37 men and injuring others. With the help of the USS Cunningham, the Waddell kept the flaming Stark on an even keel and with a ship on either side, brought the damaged vessel to Bahrain harbor for repairs.

Dunstan recalled some of his feelings while aboard the Waddell: "Once more," he

wrote, "the world became a smaller place, difficult, more difficult, to trace the origins of hate and greed, and why 'the rich keep getting richer and the poor keep getting poorer' and lives are lost to save much less than freedom! OIL! OIL! OIL! Why use ours when we can use theirs? To find out who was blasting away at whom, you've got to keep your eye on which way the weapons of death and destruction are aimed. They change, you know. In '87 we were friends and war-companions of the enfeebled Iraqians fighting against the Iranians. (Now try to keep it straight!) Don't be confused by what went on in 1991--when we were fighting the Iraqians and the Iranians came out to help us!" (16) Dunstan never lost his keen sense of irony.

After his second cruise, Dunstan went at once to Illinois to be with his sister, Margaret, dying of cancer. He came close to meeting his own death in the summer of 1988 when he suffered a severe heart attack and had to undergo triple bi-pass surgery. The \$25,000 operation (Am I not worth 50 bucks?) gave Dunstan an 8-year lease on life and a whole new outlook. "My operation has done me good!" he admitted. "My heart holds more people. It loves much deeper. I find that there is room for everyone. Questions have all been obliterated. The only moment is HERE AND NOW. It has taken me a long time, but I have learned what to do with that moment: love! Not being very smart, I have had to latch on to a GOOD TEACHER!"

1989 brought the quickly recovered patient back to sea on the USS William Standley. In Pakistan more than 30 American sailors and a 74-year old Holy Cross Brother cleaned and painted a home for handicapped Pakistani children. They donated more than \$200 of their own money to help the Sister in charge of the home. Aboard ship on Easter Sunday with no chaplain to lead the service, Dunstan read St. Mark's Gospel account of Christ's Resurrection and led the prayer service.

South Korea was the destination for Dunstan's fourth voyage, this time on the USS Francis Hammond. They visited Nicaragua enroute and in the North Pacific encountered a violent storm. Dunstan was eating dinner in the mess with other crewmen when a huge wave struck the side of the ship sending food, utensils and bodies flying in every direction. Dunstan was thrown across the room. His chest struck a door knob fracturing some of his ribs. The wind was knocked out of him for a few terrifying moments and for an entire year afterward, he suffered considerable pain. When the ship finally returned to Long Beach, Dunstan was granted permission to remain on land while continuing to teach his classes. He resided with the Brothers at

St. Anthony High School and rode a bus to the naval base every afternoon to complete his assignment.

For a time he nursed a former student afflicted with AIDS. After the young man's death Dunstan returned to the sea. This cruise was uneventful and his sixth and final outing took place on the USS Bagley in 1991. For three months there was no port call and when a two-and-one-half day of liberty did arrive in Manta, Ecuador, Dunstan and a friend danced to exhaustion in the village square during a fiesta. "The natives," he declared, "never had so much fun since they sank the FOURTH ship of Christopher Columbus' original appearance in South America." (17) "I spent seven years," he once wrote to a nephew, "on and off U.S.A. Navy ships. On each ship I was given the distinction of being made an Honorary Member of the Crew!" (18)

Back in California while waiting for yet another assignment with the U.S. Navy, Dunstan bought an economy bus ticket and traveled throughout the United States and Canada for 30 days. He planned to write a novel with 39 characters he had observed during this adventure but unfortunately did not live long enough to complete it. His wish to teach in Africa never materialized either. As his health failed he returned to Columba Hall on the Notre Dame campus and later to Dujarie House where during his last six months of life he recalled events from the distant past. Present day happenings and people confused him. He lived in his plays and thought he was still producing them. On June 20, 1996, he quietly died surrounded by medical people and the Brothers who prayed him to his eternal reward. This brilliant fascinating man had simply wasted away (he weighed 75 pounds at death!) and had gone home to the Lord he loved with such passion and tenderness.

As early as 1965 he wrote: "I'm getting old. What counts I find out is to be one's self. Stop when you can't be that. It ain't easy, but prayer and a constant begging to have Christ work in you and through you will do the job. Really the only thing that counts, as I see it, is to get stupid self out of the way and let God use one as He sees fit. This means a lot of stupid things inside and outside one's self have to go and that's where the pain comes in. I find that it is in peace and quiet, the being with one's self--whether reading or painting or writing or what--so long as one has a sense of being alone and letting that which is WITHOUT work in one from WITHIN--this I have found is what counts the most. The rest is rattle and sham and make believe... Christ and His love are everything." (19)

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He was a short spare graying man with prominent eyes and a short goatee that he stroked habitually while clearing his throat as he pondered some profound insight he wanted to share with others. He was Brother Dunstan Bowles and for 59 years as a Brother of Holy Cross, he was famous for his dramas and dramatics, talents and tantrums, humor and humility and boundless love for God and God's children. This manic mystic impressed people and places so powerfully during his 82 years of life that after his death he is remembered with fondness, admiration and best of all humor. When will we see another Dunstan? Never! God made only one of him and that was enough.

* * *

Footnotes

All letters, documents and notes cited below are presently preserved in the Archives of
the Brothers of Holy Cross, South West Province
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78704

1. See letter from Shana Alexander to Brother Dunstan, July 27, 1955.
2. "Memories" --Brother Dunstan's eulogy for his sister, Margaret. Undated manuscript.
3. Text of speech given by Brother Dunstan to parents of the St. Edward's High School Club, Austin, Texas, 1958.
4. "Brother Dunstan Uses Talents to Perfection", article in the Austin American Statesman, November 9, 1969, p.T 15.
5. Program: 22nd Annual One Act Play Tournament, Pasadena Playhouse. Undated
6. Letter to Brother Dunstan from Fr. Maurice Lans, O.C.S.O., Abbot of Abbey of Our Lady of the Holy Trinity, Huntsville, Utah, May 19, 1950.
7. Letter to Brother Dunstan from Brother Ephrem (O'Dwyer) C.S.C., Provincial, March 21, 1950.
8. Letter of Brother Dunstan to friends, June 28, 1965.
9. "Dorothy Day and Edsmen", article by Brother Dunstan for Hilltopper--St. Edward's University student newspaper, 1965.
10. Brother Dunstan's type-written note--no addressee--1954.
11. Letter of Brother Dunstan: "To those whom I love and remember", December 3, 1970.
12. Letter of Brother Dunstan to "Dear All", from Condobolin, New South Wales, Australia, February 3, 1971.
13. Letter of Appointment as Lecturer: General Studies, David Roach, Principal, December 20, 1973.
14. Letter of Brother Dunstan to his sister, Margaret, from Dacca, February 27, 1976.

15. "Richard Chandler Bowles", a biographical sketch written by Brother Dunstan for crew members of the USS Barbour County, January 17, 1986.
16. Document by Brother Dunstan begun at Notre Dame High School, Sherman Oaks, California, on December 22, 1991, and finished on May 4, 1992.
17. Letter from Brother Dunstan to "Dear friends and gentle people", May 3, 1991.
18. Dunstan's hand-written note on the back of a photograph of the USS Barbour County. Undated.
19. Letter from Brother Dunstan to "John", June, 1965.