

FROM A NOVELIST IN WAITING

DAVID LIGHT

I FIRST MET NORMAN MAILER IN 1961. I was in Grade 7, and I loved to read war stories and novels. I picked up a paperback copy of *The Naked and the Dead* in a department store, and, after reading it, I decided I wanted to become a writer, just like Norman Mailer. I had written several short horror stories in grades 6 and 7. So I decided to write a novel. I started by copying *The Naked and the Dead* from page 1, to get a feel for vocabulary, which I knew I would need for the novel. I never got beyond page 3. But I wanted to write a war novel—just like Mr. Mailer.

I met Norman Mailer again when I was in college, *Why Are We in Vietnam?* and *The Armies of the Night*. I took a few writing courses and tried writing the novel again. Instead of becoming a writer, I became a teacher. No novel was written.

The next time I met Norman Mailer was in 1973, when my wife gave me a copy of *Marilyn* as a second anniversary gift. I still hadn't written the novel. For the next twenty-four years, I was both a teacher and a principal of a high school. My wife and I raised a family. Still, no novel was written.

I *really* met Norman Mailer in April 1997. My wife and I went to Boston to see him at Borders Books, where he was going to speak about *The Gospel according to the Son* and sign copies of the book. We arrived four hours before he spoke. I sat in the second row, dead center. It was a small crowd. I asked him two questions. He answered them with interest and enthusiasm. And he signed my books. And he shook *my* hand. What a thrill. A gentleman, indeed. I was in the presence of greatness.

Then I met Mike Lennon, Barry Leeds, and John Whalen-Bridge. We created The Norman Mailer Society, which had its first conference and meeting in 2003. I became the treasurer of The Norman Mailer Society. *Me*. And I *really* met Norman Mailer—again and again and again.

Here it is, 2008. And Norman Mailer has passed on. And I still haven't written the novel. And I have retired from thirty-eight years in education.

I *will* write that novel, Mr. Mailer. And I will dedicate it to you.