REFLECTIONS

THIS ISSUE OF *THE MAILER REVIEW* IS DEDICATED TO NORRIS CHURCH MAILER. We do so with a heavy heart and much sadness, reminded daily of how much we miss her. The passing of Norris has taken a heavy toll on those of us who were privileged to know her. I do not believe that I ever met anyone who knew her who did not cherish her, whether the relationship was a casual, recent one or an intense friendship of long duration. The memorial tributes in these pages give testimony to Norris's ability to touch the hearts and minds of so many individuals. Many contributors recall her ability to transform them by her words and actions. When I think of Norris's wonderfully engaging spirit, deep generosity, and intensely compassionate spirit, the term "inspirational" is what comes to mind as the best way to describe her. Our tribute edition to Norris is, therefore, an affirmative celebration of all that she was, and is, to us.

I first met Norris and Norman in 1990 when Norman and I participated in a Hemingway conference at Harvard and Norman was the keynote speaker. I was introduced to Norman and Norris at a reception in a large hall and we exchanged only a few perfunctory words, but I recall most vividly the presence of Norris and Norman as they walked through the hall. Norman was Norman, sailing through a sea of outstretched hands and friendly smiles, enjoying the warm confines of the Hemingway crowd, most of whom well appreciated the connections between these two great artists. Norman, too, was a kind of "Papa" and he seemed to savor the emotional fervor of the moment. Norris was beautiful, statuesque, and appeared totally at ease among the large crowd as they moved along, Norris towering above her legendary husband. She, too, held her own in the daunting Harvard air. Norris and Norman impressed me as a majestic match for one another.

As we were introduced, Norris struck me as one of the most distinctive, engaging women I had ever seen. She was stunningly glamorous, of course, as so many have commented, yet my reaction to her was something much more than an aesthetic appreciation of a very attractive woman. There was elegance in her demeanor, something that was clearly recognizable, at least

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to me, but it was a quality that resists simple definition or description. One might call it "presence," "chemistry," or "magnitude." Norris Mailer, I suspected, had mesmerized strangers her entire life, probably going back to her toddler days in Arkansas. Her allure was a complex mixture of physical appeal and an ability to connect, instantaneously, on a primal level with others. This quality, I suspect, was the result of her richly textured, innate graciousness. Norris always made me feel that whatever I had to say was important and worth listening to. Many others in this volume have remarked how they, too, felt that Norris gave them special attention.

I came to know Norris over the last decade and I realize how true my initial impressions of her were two decades earlier. The past few years truly tested Norris's indomitable strength and timbre of spirit. She remained undaunted as she suffered the loss of Norman in 2007 and battled the cancer within her. Her dedication to friends and causes she believed in was remarkable. She was always thinking of how she might help others. One example was in 2009, when Norris cheerfully volunteered to speak at the Mailer Society luncheon, even thought she was clearly struggling with her illness. On that Fall afternoon, Norris's spirits were high, at least on the outside, as she spoke excitedly of her forthcoming memoir, *A Ticket to the Circus.* She refused to reveal any indication of the suffering that she was going through.

I always looked forward to emails from Norris because of her enthusiasm, optimism, and steadfast support of our common interests. (She had been a staunch advocate of the *Review* since the very beginning.) One particular gesture of hers that I admired was her signature salutation, "love." It was Norris's way of personalizing a message, a manner of connecting with someone in spite of the chill of the electronic medium. And, at least to me, this word conveyed a feeling of warmth and compassion. Norris's signature always reminded me of an important ancient Greek word for love—*philia,* which refers to a relationship of friendship. *Philia* is defined by Aristotle as "wanting for someone what one thinks good, for his sake and not for one's own, and being inclined, so far as one can, to do such things for him." Indeed, wanting something for the good of the other. I can think of no more apt description of Norris Church Mailer

Thank you, Norris, for being you and for bringing a ray of light into the lives of those who were honored to know you.

Phillip Sipiora