

A FORMIDABLE LADY

D O N N A P E D R O L E N N O N

NORRIS: A SOUTHERN AMERICAN BEAUTY WITH TALENT AND WIT who was a formidable match for her husband. Everything she touched and did—from painting, acting, writing, jewelry-making, to putting together an outfit—she made look effortless. I watched her make delicious pies and pancakes without a recipe. She hosted thirty dinner guests with the same grace and ease as she did for two. She was at home in front of a camera as well as a live audience. After her reading from *Windchill Summer* at the Provincetown Public Library, Norman turned to me and said, “Wow; that was something. She was great.” I think he was smitten all over again. While she enjoyed traveling and meeting famous people during her thirty-three years with Norman, she never forgot her Arkansas roots and her friends there, especially Aurora, who she said was “her therapist who saved her from needing a psychiatrist.”

Norris was a sensitive, sometimes fragile, thoughtful and caring person. One summer in Provincetown, she took over mothering one of my sons after a sprained ankle kept him housebound. She took him to the doctor and fed him—an unselfish act that created a special bond between them. That special bond was also part of her relationship with the Mailer clan that kept her busy. Like all mothers, she had disagreements at times with various family members; however, her love for all of them never waived. She always talked about and worried about each of the children and their families. She worried about her mother as well. After her father died, she moved Gaynell from Arkansas to Massachusetts, and then to Brooklyn in order to oversee her care. Her mother outlived her by a few months.

Underneath all of this, Norris was strong and courageous, even on her bad days, during the long, arduous battle with cancer. With the threat of death ever present, I always marveled at how she was able to continue to

keep writing, keep painting, always looking forward, and creating new challenges. I was and remain amazed at how she was able to get up every morning and put herself together to meet the world. Every day she would apply her makeup and choose the perfect jewelry for the day's outfit. I miss our emails, our conversations, and I miss her. Norris Church Mailer—a beautiful person to the end.