

CANDID SNAPSHOTS OF NORRIS MAILER

J E F F R E Y M I C H E L S O N

(1) ON NOVEMBER 11, 1980, MY THEN-GIRLFRIEND SARAH AND I are among the few non-Mailers at Norman and Norris's impromptu wedding. It happens so fast it's like an elopement except they don't go anywhere; they get married in their Brooklyn Heights apartment. Norris tells me she agreed to marry Norman not just because they have a child together, John Buffalo, but because he is a great lay.

(2) It's winter 1981. The four of us meet for dinner at "Club Norman," P.J. Clarke's on Third Avenue. After drinks at the bar, Norman leads us into the dining room. Heads turn.

Like synchronized swimmers, everybody makes the same moves. They look at Norman because he's Norman Mailer, they look at my girlfriend Sarah and Norris, because they are tall stunning women, both taller than Norman, and then they look at me in the shortest amount of time necessary to conclude I'm not worth looking at. I'm just some guy. I may be the guy with two hot babes and Norman Mailer but I have little to offer a celeb gawker. I walk the emotional tightrope between pride and humiliation.

My arm is around Sarah when Norris turns, sees my face, reads my ego's ambivalence, comes to my side and puts her arm around me so now I am at least the guy with two hotties. She elevates my status above the salt, in a move somewhere between a social nicety and emotional philanthropy.

(3) At the table Norris moves into the category of awesome when she takes a maraschino cherry stem into her mouth, makes the most contorted faces

I ever saw a gorgeous face make, and then with her gorgeous face back on, sticks her tongue out and with childlike pride presents us with the stem tied in a knot.

(4) I'm writing a memoir. No one likes it better than Norman and he writes the Foreword and gives me brilliant marketing advice. No one hates it, well, parts of it, more than Norris and she is drop dead blunt about it. In the years of rewriting I am motivated most to please her. I take out everything she hates and it totally changes the book for the better. She likes the changes and before she dies she e-mails me encouragement and a sweet blurb or two.

(5) On December 5, 2009 I turn 63. I'm a two-time cancer survivor and Norris and I have gone through lots of terrible cancer shit simultaneously during the previous decade. On my birthday I tell her I am excited to have made it to 63, since there were times I wondered if I'd see 60. She is just about to turn 60 and says as long as we both pass 60 we won't be able to complain about how *very* young we died, only how young we died.

Barbara Jean Davis Norris Church Mailer was a real life sexy star with great comedic timing. She had wide talents as a painter, model, writer and actress. She was a lady who could vamp. In another era she would have been called a classy broad. She was intuitive and kind and although soft-spoken she could and did steal Norman's thunder from time to time. She was the center, the ringmaster, the housemother, the coach and cheerleader and she helped keep the Mailer family together. And I hate that she got gypped out of time and how young she died.

With love,

Jeffrey Michelson