

REMEMBERING BARRY LEEDS

A panel at the 2015 international meeting of The Norman Mailer Conference in Provincetown was devoted to remembering Professor Barry Leeds, who passed away in 2015. Prof. Leeds was a prestigious Mailer scholar, devoted member of the Mailer Society, and beloved friend to so many individuals in numerous walks of life. Tributes submitted from other friends of Barry Leeds follow the comments from the panel.

Marc Triplett (moderator): First of all, I want to introduce to you the ladies that are at the table with me. To my immediate left is Ashley Leeds, Barry's daughter. And sitting next to her is Linda Field, Barry's sister. We are pleased to have them with us. In a few moments, they'll be talking to us as well. Linda will make some comments after I finish some introductory remarks, then I'm going to ask those of you who will offer your thoughts and memories regarding Barry to come to the microphone that is up front there. We're having this session taped, and I think that's very appropriate and an important thing for us to do. Then after we've done that, I'm going to reserve ten minutes or so toward the end, because I know that Ashley will want to make some comments as well. We look forward to that.

I'm going to start out and offer a few thoughts of my own, just because they are my experience of Barry. I think some of them are yours, some of them are like yours, and some are uniquely mine. All of them kind of relate importantly to this organization and Barry's importance to it.

This is an enduring organization. We're now more than a decade old, and I guess it's to be expected that over time we'll experience some unhappy times and some losses. We lost Robert Lucid and Deborah Martinson, and now Barry. It's good that we gather here. Barry was important to the organization in a structural way, of course. He was our vice-president. He always chaired the Lucid Award Committee. He made the nominations for the board each year. He made many presentations of his own, and he was a major contributor to *The Mailer Review*.

My experience with Barry I want to relate because it's important to my being here. Before there was the Norman Mailer Society, or at least before I knew about it, I was a Mailer fan, so to speak. I came to Mailer because of politics. From the late 1960s forward in my life, when he first influenced me with *The Armies of the Night* and *Miami* and *The Siege of Chicago*, he became an important political commentator whose views I always sought out. They weren't hard to find through the media through the years, as time went on. Then I found this book called *The Structured Vision of Norman Mailer* that Barry had written before I knew who Barry was. I read that book, and I realized there's a whole different world about Norman Mailer than the one with which I was acquainted. That particular book was interesting to me, but a lot of it was beyond my grasp in the new concepts about Mailer's view as expressed through his work. Then the next thing that happened was that I learned that the Norman Mailer Society exists. I didn't make the first session. My first one was in 2004, which is the next thing I want to talk about.

On the way here to Provincetown in 2004, I reread *Tough Guys Don't Dance*. Then the first thing that was to happen here when we gathered on the night before the conference began was a showing of *Tough Guys Don't Dance* in this room. The former significant other of mine, who attended the conference with me, and I came into this room, and we didn't know anyone here. Up to the microphone to introduce *Tough Guys Don't Dance* came Barry Leeds. I recognized him immediately. I remarked to Justin Bozung this morning that Barry's comments included his view that the novel was of a certain quality, but the film, in his view (this is my memory of it), was even better than the book. He had a very strongly positive reaction to the film, but to me it was just like, "Here it is. This is where I belong because I already feel as though I know this guy."

There was that welcome. Then throughout that conference, Barry made us feel very welcome. I felt the role of the fish out of water might have continued to some degree, but for Barry's influence in welcoming me here, to this Society, and assuring me that mine was a contribution or presence that was welcome and made me feel important to be here. I think that was not just true of Barry, it was true of others. But initially he was an important presence.

Then we developed into a scenario where frequently we would get together for dinner, at least once during these conferences, sometimes with others, and one time in Sarasota was just the two of us talking. We talked on

for three or four hours into the evening. He shared many things with me, including his experience as a college roommate of Art Garfunkel and his life in the Merchant Marines. He talked of his father. He had many stories and shared with me his unique stories and his philosophy about women. I learned a lot from listening to that. I'm not going into that, but I will always remember it.

But more importantly he was always interested in what you were about, what you thought. The empathy in the man was a very special quality. I'll miss him profoundly. I spoke to him last a couple of weeks before his passing. He was in the hospital, and he just sounded like the Barry I always knew. He wanted to talk about having seen on social media pictures I'd posted of my granddaughter. She's two years old, and he said, "Well, she's learned to say 'no,' right? That the main thing." And I said, "Yes, that true. That's the way it is." He didn't want to talk about what he was going through. He wanted to hear from me, and we vowed to talk again. Unfortunately, that didn't occur, but what a wonderful last conversation and last contact I had with Barry.

I'm glad I've known him. When you see someone only annually, you think that there are limitations to what that experience is going to be like, that you can't become that close. But that's not true. We did communicate through the years via email, sometimes by phone. He was a person that really knew how to make you feel like you were important. He has so many qualities in terms of his work as a teacher, a professor, and a writer. Others of you can address those things better than I. But that's my observation and introduction into Barry.

Now, I would like to ask Linda if you would like to say a few words, and then we'll open the floor.

Linda Field: OK, thanks so much. This is miraculous. This is a wonderful event. Thanks so much for including us in this. One of the nice things for me is to finally see what The Norman Mailer Society is all about and put faces to the names that Barry always talked about, so that's really special for me. Three of the things that were central in Barry's life were his teaching, his almost lifelong interest in Norman Mailer (starting with his PhD thesis), and a wide circle of very close friends. I feel like the Norman Mailer Society brought all three of those together for him. It was very special for him. All through the year, he would be telling me about the papers he was preparing

and the people he was communicating with, and how he was looking forward to coming to this conference each year. It was very special to him. I know that his academic interest in Norman Mailer led him to a very close friendship with Norman and Norman coming and working with some of his students. There was that merging of the three very important parts of his life, which is really very special.

I looked at the program cover, and I know both Ashley and I were overwhelmed with the beauty of that, the fact that he was on the cover here. I know how much this would mean to him and how much this tribute would mean. The only other thing I want to add is that one of Norman's daughters came to the memorial service. She said to me, "I know that somewhere out there Barry and Norman are having a drink together," and that's the image that I hold on to. I want to give that image to all of you, too.

Marc Triplett: Thank you, Linda. I know that a number of you have things to share with us about Barry. If you could step to that microphone, if you wouldn't mind because we're recording.

David Light: When I first met Barry, I didn't meet him! I'd been into Mailer since seventh grade. I read *The Naked and the Dead*. I became a teacher, and I got married. But in 1972–73, I needed to know a lot more about what I was reading; what the hell was I reading. Mailer was fascinating to me, and somehow I came across Barry's name in the newspaper, the *Hartford Courant*. I found out that he liked to learn about Mailer and had a book about him. I wrote Barry out of Central Connecticut State College. I never expected him to respond, but he got right back and sent me a copy of his book. He gave me some ideas on where to look for some information, especially because we didn't have the internet back then and there wasn't too much out there.

I settled back into reading Norman through the years. In 2001–2002, I connected with Mike Lennon. I shared with Mike my interest in Mailer, and he shared his. We started a connection. Thirty years later from when I first wrote Barry (I hadn't met him yet), I ended up in a car with him and Mike Lennon, John Whalen-Bridge and Robert Lucid in Cambridge, Massachusetts, starting the foundation of The Norman Mailer Society. Here I am: I'm not an academic, I was a teacher and high school principal, and I love Mailer. I'm sitting in this car with these high-profile Mailer people. I had died and gone to heaven! What a great ride that was for those few days during the cre-

ation of the Mailer Society. There were stories of how they convinced Norman to allow us to create the Society, but that's for another day, for someone else to tell.

From that day forward, Barry and I would meet at least once a year here at the conference. That was our relationship. Sometimes we would call each other. Every time I came to a conference, I would somehow always see him first in the lobby of the hotel checking in! I would come in, he would look. He'd say, "David! My buddy!" He would come over and give me that bear hug. He'd turn to my wife, Susan, and same thing . . . give her a kiss. When I arrived on Wednesday, I came in. I just stood there, and I looked over at the check-in. I just spent a minute imagining that bear hug that I wouldn't get any more.

Marc Triplett: Thank you, David. Chris Busa?

Chris Busa: That was extremely heartfelt and evocative of that warmth that Barry had. I appreciate the emotional dimension of your remarks, David. Ashley, were you on the cover of *A Moveable Beast*?

Ashley Leeds: Yes! I'm pleased you recognized me!

Chris Busa: She appeared as a very tiny person with a very big bear, a huge man protecting this long-ago person. I thought that [it was interesting] to see you now, the first time I've seen you in my life. I've only seen the cover of that book. I did a brief notice of Barry's last memoir, which combined his love of life and literature, and married them together. We talked about him being a roommate of Art Garfunkel and all these experiences he had in the Merchant Marines. He was a large, virile, powerful man, as well as a public scholar. In his memoir, *A Moveable Beast* from 2014, he offers the connections that have driven him. The cover photograph shows the very large and dominant figure of Leeds watching over his tiny daughter on the edge of a swimming pool. However much Mailer made madness into a form of vitality, Leeds shows how vitality is a higher form of morality. Many of the scenes, in his book, Leeds recalls show the courage in standing up to bullying, racism, ignorance, and obtuse arrogance. In his terse and trenchant memoir, less than two hundred pages, he takes us through the fifty states in the union, offering vivid glimpses of key moments, as if he is a man ready to die and must recapitulate what must not be forgotten. Leeds was vice-

president of The Norman Mailer Society, founded to sustain the memory of one of Provincetown's most important writers. Mailer, if he were alive, would praise Barry's book.

Bonnie Culver: Just to say a little bit about the "female thing." Deborah Martinson and I had several times where we were partners in helping plan many conferences. Once in Austin, Barry kept coming up to us (it was at first off-putting) and saying, "Girls, are all those seats down front *really* reserved? Because I would *really* like to sit down front." Or, "Girls, is the banquet *really* going to end at 4:30? Because we wanted to get out of here at 4:00." So all through Austin, Deborah and I heard that.

So fast forward to last year, the conference was at Wilkes University. Kalie Jones had offered to come, and we wanted to try to run some open workshops on fiction and non-fiction for Wilkes students, to try to get more students to come to the conference. As I called up Barry, I said, "Well, Kalie's agreed to come. And since you have your book coming out with a memoir, and she has hers, would you like to teach with her?" We emailed back and forth for several weeks, but he never really answered me directly. He kept saying, "Well . . . I don't know, Bonnie." And finally I figured it out, because I'm a little thick, apparently. He said, "I really prefer not to teach with Kalie." What he really wanted was to read from his book.

I had a box of 25 of them delivered to Wilkes. He did a reading, and it was absolutely packed. I know a lot of you were there last year to hear him read and you bought the book. I actually had one set aside for me, but somebody wanted it, so we sold it. Barry came out afterwards, and he was glowing, because he was so overwhelmed by the warmth of the reception. He had a book in his hand, and he said, "Did you get my book? I'll sign it for you." And I said, "No, I didn't." He said, "Well, you can have this one!" And I think the price was \$10, but he said, "You only have to give me \$5!" So, I thought I was going to have a signed book that was free!

With all of that, and with every conference with him asking, "Do we have to do it this way? Do we have to do it that way?", he was always the very first board member who came up to Deborah and me, in Austin and other conferences, and last year at Wilkes. Last year he had tears in his eyes when he thanked me. I always got the bear hugs at the end and a thank you. You had to learn that about him as a female, because when Deb heard "Girls," her hair would fly up in the air! He just wanted everyone to have the best expe-

rience when we came together here. He was the unofficial welcoming committee to me and many other members. He would sit down and ask, “How did you get here? Why are you interested in Mailer?” So, to me, he represents some of the best spirit of the Society.

Marc Triplett: Thank you.

Robert Dowling: For those of you who don’t know me, I’m Robert Dowling. I taught with Barry at Central Connecticut State University for ten years. I feel honored to be the representative of Central to talk about Barry. We all know in the English department at Central how incredibly important this meeting was for him. Like his sister said, he talked about it all year long. He’s the reason I’m here right now, and the reason I came here three years ago and absolutely loved it. He encouraged me to apply for a Norman Mailer Writers Colony Fellowship, which I did. I had a marvelous time with another beloved, recently deceased colleague, Deborah Martinson. She was our instructor and was magnificent. It’s hard to come up with stories about him, because everybody knows him well. I just want to tell you about the first time I ever met him and the last time I ever heard from him.

First time, it was my on campus visit to get the job at Central, which I really wanted. I arrived at the campus and went into the building. I walked into this horrible, old elevator, and it broke down after a few floors. As if I wasn’t anxious enough for my job interview, I get this catastrophe ordeal. I did get out of there and arrived at the English department. Sure enough, I’m already anxious and sweaty, and there’s this enormous guy with this hunting vest—the most intimidating-looking individual! Now I gotta deal with this? As everybody here knows, first thing he did was say, “Ooooh!” with this huge handshake. He grabbed my arm, and within thirty seconds we were best buddies. He just instantaneously changed the track of my mind and attitude. Suddenly I just felt great and welcomed. The day went terrific, and I got the job. I think in some weird way that Barry may have been responsible for that.

The last time was when he was in the hospital, and I sent him a note. When he got out, he sent me an email when he got back home. He said, “Oh, Rob! It was just like a movie! The nurse comes running down the hallway as I’m leaving the hospital, and she’s waving your card in her hand. I get that wonderful card from you! It’s just like a movie.” As many people who know

Barry know, he says everything is “just like a movie.” And that is the last time that I was in contact with him.

Then, September 30th, I opened up my copy of *A Moveable Beast* that he had inscribed to read the inscription. He’s so generous that I’m a little embarrassed to read it. This is signed on September 30th, 2014, so I actually read it exactly one year later. He says, “To my pal, Rob Dowling, with thanks for your interest in this and for the wonderful gift of your own work. *Vaya con Dios, amigo.*” Right back at you, Doc.

Marc Triplett: Thank you, Rob.

Bob Begiebing: I want to say, first of all, that is a gorgeous photo of Barry in a state of utter pleasure. I think Jerry Lutz took it. That’s a real keeper, that one. I got off to a very strange start with Barry, a very rocky beginning. My first book was being considered by University of Texas Press. They didn’t publish it because of Barry. They had a glowing review, and Barry gave a lukewarm review. So they sent it back, and the editor who was working on it left at the same time. The whole thing deep-sixed, and I had to find another publisher. I didn’t know who this guy Barry Leeds was, but he had the courage, at least, to put his name on the reader’s report. Then I found out he’s down at Central Connecticut State University, and it turns out that his chair is my brother-in-law, Loftus Jestin! Loftus tells Barry, “Do you realize that you deep-sixed my brother-in-law’s book?” Barry said, “No! What’s his name?” They went back and forth, and Barry said, “I had no idea. I didn’t mean for the book to be not published!” Barry and I never communicated about this.

Then I saw Barry for the first time at Jestin’s father’s funeral. He came over, and he gave a big handshake and hug. In the next 12 to 15 years that we knew one another, we never mentioned that he had written a report on my book and deep-sixed it. Then we became very friendly through this organization. When I came here, we became kind of cronies. He needed driving in Provincetown and I did the driving for him.

I called him at the very end of his life, and we didn’t know what the result would be. He was just as generous as ever. Toward the end, we were reading each other’s manuscripts, and he wasn’t deep-sixing them any more! He was being honest about it, and I was being honest about his. We became very close friends and colleagues, and I, like so many of you, really do miss him deeply.

Marc Triplett: Thank you, Bob. Mike?

Mike Lennon: I find it hard to talk about Barry because he is such a dear friend and a pillar of the Society. Dave was talking about the first meeting up in Cambridge, which was really a meeting of the ALA. It was Barry's doing; it was Barry's idea. Before there was any idea of the Mailer Society, Barry had this idea to put on a session on Norman Mailer in Cambridge at the American Literature Association. Let's get all our friends together. Barry and I knew each other from way back. I don't remember where I met him, but I knew his book. I still have my copy of it. I was writing about Mailer a few years later. My dissertation was a few years later after Barry's, and when I read his, I saw this great competition. I never showed it to him, because his book is one of the pillars that began Mailer scholarship, *The Structured Vision of Norman Mailer*.

Barry helped me in my career. I think he reviewed every single thing I ever wrote about Norman Mailer in one place or another. He was a reviewer for *Choice* magazine. He would review my stuff there, in *The Mailer Review*, and in newspapers. He had that bear-like quality that everybody noticed. He could be very honest, but he could be very sweet. But there was also one shard of timidity in him that I noticed of the years, and it was whenever we got together with Mailer. He was so much in awe of Norman Mailer. They had met early on, then they were separated for a long time. Finally back in the 1980s, he came back into Norman's life.

I remember him coming to Provincetown to see Norman and Norris. If he was afraid of Norman, he was unable to almost speak in Norris's presence. She was of course a gorgeous, beautiful woman at this time, always beautiful, with a very strong presence. He would come in the house and tiptoe around. He wouldn't do anything. I remember that Norris came up to me and said, "What's wrong with Barry? He's so timid!" I said, "What do you mean? Barry? Timid?" She said, "He came up to me, and I was doing something. He waited until I turned and saw him. He said in this tiny, squeaky little voice, 'Is it alright if I have a drink of water?' And I said, 'Barry! You don't have to ask to have a drink of water in my house!' 'OK!'"

He was like that with Norman, as well, although they became very close, warm friends. Barry could light up a room, and Norman always lit up whenever Barry showed up on the scene. There was something about Barry's na-

ture that appealed to Norman immensely. He was Norman's kind of a guy. They become very good friends.

I talked to Barry several times on the phone in the weeks before he died. I was trying to relay information to members of the Society. We had several conversations that move me very deeply remembering my friend's death. Those are my memories of Barry.

Marc Triplett: Thank you, Mike. Personally, I want to thank you for keeping us apprised of Barry's situation toward the end, because that enabled me to have that telephone conversation I had with him. Anyone else wish to step forward? Yes.

Timothy Nolan: My name is Timothy Nolan, and I'm a writer from Brooklyn. I was asked by Dr. Lennon last year to participate in a panel. I'd been a member, but I'd never attended a conference before. At my first conference, I was very flattered and extremely intimidated. We had the panel, and when we entered the room and looked out at the audience, the first face I saw was Dr. Leeds. I hadn't met him before, but I knew he was an important person in this organization. He could not have been more encouraging as we were speaking. I made one observation, and I looked at him with his amazing, big, blue eyes. He nodded, and he smiled. For a second, I went from being a stranger to feeling like I belonged here.

After our panel was done, I went across the hall to listen to him read. That was a great and wonderful experience. When it was done, I had a second to thank him for coming to our panel, participating, and helping me out. We ended up walking to the luncheon for a brief period of time. He was very encouraging, asking me where I was from, how long I'd been here, and so on. It was this lovely conversation. It actually gave me the encouragement to suggest this year's panel to Dr. Lennon, because I figured Barry will be there. That'll be cool. We'll have that nice little interchange again. Because of his encouragement, I thought maybe there is something here to contribute. So I was really looking forward to seeing him when we got here.

Needless to say, when I saw on the website that he had passed, I sent Dr. Lennon an email asking, "Is this true?" And he said, "Yes, we're all very sad." It's strange, because I certainly did not know him as well as most of you. Our face-to-face encounters were rather brief. But I was very moved and sad. It stinks that I won't see him when we do our thing. I came into the room this

morning and saw the picture, and I thought, that's exactly the look he shot me when we were here. It doesn't take you long to realize when you find a kindred spirit, and I'll think of him that way. I'll attend future conferences, enjoy myself and being with all of you, but it's mostly his doing. Thank you.

Marc Triplett: Thank you. Ezra.

Ezra Cappell: I think a lot of us have a similar experience with Barry Leeds. My first time coming to this conference, I wasn't really sure what to expect. I'd been to a lot of different academic conferences, the MLA, for example. There's nobody greeting you when you go to the MLA with a bear hug! But, when I pulled up here at the Provincetown Inn the first time, in 2006 or 2007, I had never met Barry. I had met most of the folk who come to the Mailer conference. I'd met Norman Mailer the year before at UT Austin, and he had said, "Come to Provincetown. We have a conference every year." So I said, "OK, I'll give this a shot." Coming from West Texas to Provincetown is quite a schlep, as we say back in New York. As I pulled up, there was Barry. He said, "Are you here for the Mailer conference?" I said, "Yeah!" He said, "Well, we're just going out for dinner down the block to the Red Inn. Just dump your bags behind the desk, and come on with us." So we went out to dinner. Mike was there, and Phil and Vic.

But the most memorable character of that evening was undoubtedly Barry Leeds. By the end of the evening, we had discovered that he had taught at my institution, the University of Texas El Paso, briefly back in the 1960s. He was telling me stories into the evening about colleagues of mine, incredible times that he'd had down there. A friendship was born, and I can't say enough about just how welcoming he was to myself and other newer members of the Mailer Society. I know that Maggie wrote a really beautiful tribute about Barry, very powerful. I think that was the experience for many of us, how he took you under his enormous wing and made you feel, not just a part of something, but important for it. He was really building the future of this organization, which was deeply important to him.

What will really be missed is this larger-than-life character. You can see what a wonderful teacher he must have been (I never got to see him). Truly, a wonderful human being, a larger-than-life figure that we will all miss but that we're all better for having met.

Marc Triplett: Thank you, Ezra. And thank you for making the schlep from El Paso. Anyone else? Dave?

Dave Thomas: Ezra, I wasn't going to say anything. But it pleased me to say, you're a professor, right? You were a little nervous about coming to The Norman Mailer Society. As many of you know after coming for three or four years, I'm not an academic, and I'm not a famous literary critic. I look at myself as a serious reader and appreciator of Norman Mailer's work. I retired from the U.S. Forest Service ten years ago, and I wanted to change how I was living my life. I wanted to get more back into literature, and Mailer was one of the things.

I was Googling one day, and I found The Norman Mailer Society one day. I think you guys had pictures on your website. I'm from the West, and I thought, "Oh my god, do I really want to go and be with the eastern literary elite?" It was a big decision for me to fly from Salt Lake City. I went to the Washington, D.C., conference, where I got to meet Norris, which was really cool. I was still nervous about returning, because it wasn't my normal group of people I run with. But Barry and I just recognized each other's faces. At the other conferences I started coming to, he really was incredibly generous to a common reader. Don't think of that negatively, I'm just a regular reader.

My last, fond memory of him happened after I read *A Moveable Beast*. I really liked it, and I emailed him and told him. We were at Wilkes at the reception in the room where Norman was one time. And he loved Hemingway, so we were talking about Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River." I felt the common reader and the professor had hooked up!

Marc Triplett: Thank you. We're getting close to the noon hour, and I thank you all for participating. I'm sorry, John Buffalo. I didn't see you.

John Buffalo Mailer: The last time I had the privilege of having a drink with Barry, he was telling me about one of his last conversations with Norman. Norman was talking about whether or not he'd be remembered when he was gone. Would his legacy live on? Would people still read his books? Then he looked at Barry, and he said, "I don't even know why I'm asking you that. I know what you're going to say." Barry said, "No, you don't! I think they're going to forget about you!"

I can't tell you all how much I look forward to this time of year and being here. Nicole said it best: "He still speaks." When we're here and talking about

Norman's work, he still speaks. When I think about all the conversations I had with Barry, he was such the quintessential sensitive tough guy. He *was* a Hemingway character. Everybody said it, that *grip*, man! If you shook that guy's hand, you felt like "There's nothing going to hurt me in the world at all with this guy at my side!" I think about how much time and dedication he spent to build this Society and to fight for the legacy that Norman represents. He's such an integral, quintessential part of that. Everybody shares their stories about him. I know that he will always continue to speak. I don't know if I can put into words the profound respect I have for his generosity of spirit that has inspired me and been an incredible education. I look forward to carrying on that spirit with all of you in his honor for as long as we have. I miss you, Barry. Thank you for everything.

Marc Triplett: Thank you, John, that was a wonderful tribute. Let me make sure I haven't overlooked anyone before we go on. Alright, Ashley, can you speak with us?

Ashley Leeds: Thanks so much for inviting me here and for this beautiful memorial. Thank you also that we heard from many of you last April when my father passed. Several of you came to Connecticut to attend services, and we really appreciate your thoughts and words, then and now. I speak for the whole family in saying that the tributes on the Mailer Society web page captured him so perfectly. They were very meaningful to us, to see how much he meant to all of you just as he did to us. I think he would feel that his worth, his life, has been everything he wanted it to be, to see the influence that he's had here.

Literature was extremely important to my father. He actually considered titling his memoir *My Life in Literature, and Literature as Life*. Preeminent among the literary influences of his life was the work of Norman Mailer. It was a fifty-year relationship. He wrote his dissertation on Norman Mailer in the 1960s. Later, he was able to establish a close relationship with Norman, Norris, and many of the children, whom he spoke of often. It was very, very important to his life. With the Society, he had a home where he could share that influence with others and experience it together. I'm so happy he never had to retire from attending these meetings. He attended every meeting that occurred during his lifetime. I think, unquestionably, it was one of his favorite weekends of the year. He planned his whole year around this, because

this is where he was at home. He could share what was so influential to him with other people who felt the same way.

One of the reasons that he was so supportive of creating the Society was that he recognized that Mailer's legacy ultimately depends on young scholars, scholars who may never have had the opportunity to meet Norman personally, but who will continue to discuss and interpret Mailer's work, even as the contemporary context changes. One of the things that struck me that my father talked about in his memoir was that every time we read a book, it's different because we're different. As we and our society change, Mailer's work remains relevant, but there will be new things to discover.

There's nothing that my father enjoyed more than encouraging young people, both students and other scholars, to do this kind of work. So I thank Mike and others for developing the idea of the Barry Leeds Travel Fund, which will provide grants to young scholars to come to this meeting and to continue the important work of the Society well into the future. I'm happy to be able to provide an initial contribution on behalf of the family, and I hope some of you will join me in supporting this kind of legacy. I can't think of anything that my father would be more happy about than to be honored by his colleagues that he values so very highly. I thank you for embracing him and for allowing him to embrace all of you over the years.

The following tributes to Barry Leeds, in alphabetical order, were sent to The Mailer Review.

Phil Bufithis: Barry and I were buddies. We shared a lot beyond the Norman Mailer Society. He was a vivid man: kind and affectionate. We had happy times together.

Bill Lowenburg: A few days before he died, Barry Leeds emailed to apologize for not calling recently. He was recovering from surgery and said a tumor had been removed. "The surgeon swears he got it all," he wrote. "My spirits remain strong like bool."

I called him in the morning a few days later and when he didn't pick up I left a short message. I thought it strange when he didn't call back that day, because unlike everyone else in my life, Barry *always* returned calls. Tonight, when my wife and I arrived back at the house from our walk, I opened my

email and was hit with the classic knockout punch—the one you don’t see coming.

I met Barry because of our common interests in Norman Mailer and boxing. After my presentation to the Norman Mailer Society at the Library of Congress some years ago, Barry was the first to compliment me, peppering me with questions and beginning a friendship that was still growing and will continue to grow because of the seeds he planted through his faith in me and the encouragement he always offered.

At a subsequent Mailer Society Conference, in Sarasota, Barry invited me to join him at breakfast every day. He introduced me to the stream of his friends who stopped by our table. He knew nearly everyone at the conference and made it a point to introduce himself to newcomers and let them know their presence was appreciated. During breaks we always seemed to end up together, exchanging observations about Mailer, boxing, and our other common passion, teaching. As we got to know one another better, we felt that our conversations were possibly bringing some new perspectives to Mailer’s interest in boxing and his writing on the subject. We decided to approach Phil Sipiora, editor of *The Mailer Review*, and Mailer Society president Mike Lennon, about collaborating on an article and presenting a panel discussion at the following year’s conference at Wilkes University.

Mike Lennon introduced us to Ron Fried, another Mailerian with extensive boxing knowledge, and for several months Barry, Ron, and I exchanged a torrent of emails. When I apprised Phil Sipiora of our progress and asked about the length of our article, he half-jokingly replied, “how about 10,000 words,” referring to Mailer’s famous 1963 essay on the Liston-Patterson fight, “Ten Thousand Words a Minute.” Along with the adrenaline rush spiked by Phil’s confidence in us came the empty feeling in the pit of the stomach that accompanies eying the opponent in the opposite corner just before the opening bell of a main event. Ten thousand words is a hell of a lot of words.

Months later, with the *Review* deadline looming, I drove up to Connecticut from my home in Pennsylvania to confer with Barry. We had a pile of ideas from the emails and examples from Mailer’s writings, but had nothing that resembled a coherent structure for a lengthy article. Barry met me at my hotel with two shopping bags bulging with food and drink to sustain me for the weekend and then took me out to dinner. At the restaurant, he knew all of the waitresses by name.

Back at the hotel, we talked until well after midnight. After he left, I spent a few more hours taking notes and writing questions generated by our conversation. The next morning when I went downstairs to meet him in the lobby he was wrapping up an apparently lengthy conversation with a fellow on the hotel staff. I got the idea they had known one another for years, perhaps had grown up together, but in fact they had just met. Barry had arrived at the hotel an hour earlier and had not called because he wanted to let me get some sleep.

We drove to nearby Hartford, where Barry took me to Mark Twain's house and Harriet Beecher Stowe's house. Barry had visited the homes many times, but he knew how much I admired both writers. His knowledge of their lives supplemented, and, in some cases, surpassed that of the tour guides, making for an unforgettable experience. It became clear that Barry's scholarship extended far beyond his interest in Mailer and I set a goal of reading as much of his work as I could track down.

Returning to our daunting task back at the hotel, we talked for another eight-hour shift and the Mailer article began to take shape. I shared the questions I'd generated overnight and Barry drew from his encyclopedic knowledge of Mailer's work to provide examples. We referred to Ron Fried's comments and over the course of the evening roughed out a sequence for the eventual article, "Split Decisions: An Asynchronous Discussion on Mailer and Boxing," which was published in the 2014 issue of *The Mailer Review*. The following October at the Mailer Society Conference at Wilkes University, Barry moderated a panel based on the article, where in typical fashion he warmly elicited additional commentary from Peter Alson, who shared his experiences of sparring with Norman.

That night at the hotel Barry also shared a lot of his life story, which he had just finished writing for his soon-to-be-published memoir, *A Moveable Beast*. You should read it. By turns hilarious and poignant, it also contains some juicy sexy parts which no doubt made Barry's family blush, but that's the kind of guy he was. He also shared with me the tragic story of losing his daughter. Like Norman Mailer, he seemed to need to share his pain along with his joy, in order to present a complete picture of who he was.

Driving home from Connecticut, I passed through the town of Sandy Hook, where the previous year the tragic shootings had taken place at the elementary school. I reflected on ways that Norman Mailer's writing and Barry Leeds' insights and scholarship have helped me to process my own feelings

about the inescapable violence woven into American culture. Like Norman Mailer, earlier in our lives, Barry and I both explored violence on a personal level. Barry was an expert in close-quarters combat and firearms. I spent six years as a sparring partner and boxing trainer, and, later, ten years documenting automobile demolition derby. I believe the experiences served to eventually transform both of us into more empathetic and peaceful individuals.

“My spirits remain strong like bool.” Indeed. Barry outweighed me by about a hundred pounds and when I left him for the last time he hugged me. I could feel the deep reserves of energy and courage and will that had sustained him through years of grieving and painful episodes of Crohn’s disease, and, most recently, cancer.

I’ll always remember Barry as one of the gentlest and most considerate people I’ve known. From his personal relationships to his teaching, to his writings, Barry Leeds enriched countless lives. The rest of us should be so fortunate.

Maggie McKinley: Four years ago, when I was fresh out of grad school and attending the Norman Mailer Society conference for the first time, Barry Leeds was one of the first people I met. In retrospect, I think there could have been no better introduction to the Society, for Barry was a perfect embodiment of its essence: a combination of humor, enthusiasm, curiosity, and intellectualism, though entirely free of intellectual grand-standing. From our first introduction, Barry was incredibly welcoming and completely genuine in his kindness. For the rest of that conference, Barry made sure I was never stuck standing idly, awkwardly alone with no one to talk to—he invited me out to lunches and dinners, introduced me to other friends and acquaintances, and engaged me in such candid and friendly conversation that I felt as though we’d known each other for years. I have a sense that this had long been one of Barry’s gifts. His ability to put people at their ease was entirely authentic, not at all an orchestrated social skill, but based solely in his desire for good company and good conversation.

While I know he respected me as a colleague, over the past few years, Barry also took on what I can only describe as a more protective, even paternal, role. He would regularly check in with me to make sure everything in my life—not just my work—was going smoothly. Sometimes, his concerns were minor but, for me, unforgettable in their thoughtfulness. A couple of

years ago, for example, I had forgotten to bring any money with me on the first day of one of our annual conferences—not a travesty, but it had presented a couple of slightly embarrassing conundrums when paying for meals and cabs and such. Barry came up to me discreetly at one point to ask me if I needed “a little walking around money,” which he would, of course, be happy to provide. He then proceeded to *apologize* for this generous favor. “I hope you don’t mind me offering, Maggie,” he said. “I know you can take care of yourself, but I can’t help but treat you as I would a daughter.” Coming from someone else, such a statement might sound condescending, but if you knew Barry even a little bit, you know that coming from him it was nothing of the sort. I was touched he would think of me that way.

At other times his concerns were more significant: he always wanted to make sure I wasn’t spending too much time at work, and that I had “someone special” to spend time with. He was unembarrassed about asking personal questions, which never seemed probing or inappropriate because . . . well, because he was Barry. He just wanted to make sure I was happy. And he was happy too, every time I saw him. He would share stories about his “lady,” about his family, about rooming with Art Garfunkel, about his friend Norman, about meeting Arthur Miller, about his love of teaching.

Barry, I will miss the comfort of seeing you every year, I will miss our conversations about Mailer and your endless supply of stories, I will miss hearing you recite whole paragraphs from *An American Dream* and *The Armies of the Night* in your distinctive and confident voice, I will miss your kind inquiries and unwavering support, and I will miss the twinkle in your eye that reminded all of us that all of this should be *fun*, that we should remember to love what we do, as you did.

Phil Sipiora: I think that I will always be in a state of profound sadness over the passing of my friend, Barry Leeds. I have so many burning (and comforting) memories of Barry, whose history in shaping The Norman Mailer Society and *The Mailer Review* may not be known to everyone in the Society. Barry worked tirelessly and enthusiastically with Michael Lennon in founding the Society, and Barry was the only vice president that we have ever had. Barry Leeds was never reticent to express his views—always with passion—and Barry *always* vigorously supported any course of action that would support the Society’s mission to nourish and sustain the legacy of Norman Mailer. Barry was absolutely indefatigable in everything he under-

took and his words published over many years in the *Review* are testimony to his resiliency in nurturing the continuing reputation of Mailer. When the *Review* was first proposed to the Society membership in 2006, Barry, along with Mike Lennon, were the strongest proponents to advocate that the Society embrace and underwrite the journal. In consequence, the motion to launch the *Review* passed unanimously and I was named founding editor, a most humbling and gratifying experience. Barry immediately offered to assist me on the editorial side of the journal as there were no original *Review* staff members—and Barry’s help was extremely beneficial and deeply appreciated over the years. Indeed, Barry shared the growing pains of the *Review* with me many a night over the telephone and always at conferences as we strove to make the *Review* better each year. I think that Barry would have been very proud of our 10th anniversary this year. And I’m not sure that either one of us ever dreamt that the *Review* would continue on as long as it has.

I was honored to have shared with Barry our mutual passion for literature, especially Mailer and Hemingway. Yet Barry and I also shared many other interests and a solid chunk of many of our late night conversations focused on nonprofessional topics. Barry’s intellectual and scholarly niche will never be filled, yet it is the niche in our hearts that remains as we go on without our irreplaceable friend. Barry Leeds was and is a force that will never leave me and will always be part of the spiritual fabric of my life and of the *Review*. Goodbye, Barry, my dear friend.

John Whalen-Bridge: Everyone please say it with me: “Barry Fucking Leeds.” Perhaps I should explain my title. Suppose you hadn’t seen Barry for awhile and there he was at a Mailer conference. If you speak GUY-dialect, you’d walk right up to him and say, “Barry-Fucking-Leeds! how are you?” My opening quiz question is, What would he say back? Don’t be shy—raise hands if you know. . . .

There are many things Barry might say, but he would probably say, “I applaud your perspicacious uses of tmesis, the linguistic phenomenon in which a word or phrase is separated into two parts, with other words interrupting between them.” Heaven and earth always intermingled freely in a Barry conversation, if by “heaven” we mean Latinate sesquipedalianisms (that augment and cultivate the possibilities of correctness, meticulousness, and particularity), and if by “earth” we mean Guy Talk or Man Talk, which the

Urban Dictionary defines as “essentially a mix of philosophy, politics, religion, sports, women, small talk, and profanity.”

Barry and I routinely talked on the phone. I enjoyed admirable camaraderie with Barry Leeds, something that will never be taken away. I know people have come together to celebrate Barry’s life, and that is exactly what I mean to do. I would be trivializing his life and wasting the opportunity if I did not say what I learned about friendship from Barry, and this requires talking about pain, as well.

How did we meet? Mike Lennon, friend to all Mailerians, put us together. We were all to meet Norman in Provincetown to talk to him about having a Mailer Society, something I’d written to Mailer to request. Skeptical Norman wanted to discuss in person. So Barry and I drove together from Bristol to P-town, telling dirty jokes and finishing each other’s sentences, especially when one of us tried to show off by quoting a long Mailer passage. Road warrior buddies, we became. Barry, Mike, and I met at Norman’s house, drank some sort of Pimm’s drinks Norman liked, then there was fantastic talk and a walk over to Michael Shea’s for dinner. I had not been able to get a word in edgewise all during dinner, but at one point Mike Lennon and Barry had to go to the men’s room, and I asked Norman *quickly* if he minded us starting the society. He said yes, and when Mike and Barry came out from their tinkle break, there existed a Norman Mailer Society. While starting and finishing a bottle of Laphroaig, there was gossip about Gore Vidal and Kurt Vonnegut. Fun, right?

With the exception of maybe three days, I talked with Barry every day for the past 17 months. We had talked about depression many times over the years, but I was in the bottom of the bottom, suffice it to say, and Barry started looking after me. He could reframe any bad day and find within it the good—or at least the better. His ever-comforting voice challenged demons. It was good to be reminded that demons, though they have power, are not all-powerful.

In Norman Mailer’s novel *An American Dream*, the protagonist Rojack wants to make a phone call to heaven to speak to Cherry. When my mother died in 1989, I kept wanting to call her. Whenever I walked by a temple I’d offer incense and have a silent chat with her. I’d tell her what’s new, what the grandchildren she never met were doing, how much I loved her, and I would thank her. If you really love someone, it isn’t that hard to do—and it’s easier with Skype. I will keep talking to Barry, as I’m sure many will.

Barry finished strong in many ways. He loved writing his memoirs. (*Barry taught Art Garfunkel to swear!*) He worked on it every day and took immense pleasure in the response. He loved teaching his final class on Hemingway, and he loved Jan—a heavenly reward for all his hard work and perseverance in the game of life. He loved his daughter and his grandchildren and spoke adoringly about Ashley’s strength and achievements. He loved driving up to see Linda. He loved his father and tried to understand him as a whole man. He mourned his daughter and brother who died too soon. He loved his students, and they loved him.

Direct address, Skype to Heaven: Barry, you **are** a model friend, so let’s keep talking. I’m not sure what happens next, but perhaps “Past and future come together on thunderheads, and our dead hearts live with lightning in the wounds of the gods,” or something like that. Be well.