

PROVINCETOWN'S BOSWELL

J . M I C H A E L L E N N O N

CHRIS BUSA CAME INTO MY LIFE SOMETIME IN THE MID-1980s when I was beginning to spend a lot of time at 627 Commercial Street, the home of Norman and Norris Mailer. Chris lived about 100 yards down the street at 650, and he was always biking to and from his weather-beaten house, where his father had lived, down to the center of Provincetown. All the Mailers knew him and he gave tennis lessons to several of them. I think it was Norman who introduced me, but it might have been his sister Barbara, or her son Peter, both of whom played tennis with him. At that time, the magazine he devoted the rest of his life to, *Provincetown Arts*, was just getting started. By the time Donna and I bought a condo in P-town in 1997, I had come to realize that if one wanted to understand P-Town, the oldest art colony in the country, the four-color, oversize annual issues of Chris's magazine were required reading. Every issue examined the lives and work of a swath of the town's visual and literary artists, many of who supported and contributed to the magazine. Chris knew them all personally and profiled most of them. I have a full shelf of copies of *PA*, and find myself going back to them again and again to peruse a profile, review, or photo spread.

Mailer may have been the only writer or artist who appeared on two covers of the magazine (1987, 1999), and all of his books from 1985 on were reviewed there. Chris's brilliant, definitive interview with him in the 1999 issue focuses on Mailer's long involvement with the town—his first visit was in June 1943, during the wartime blackout which gave him the impression he was seeing the town as it was in the late 18th century. He spoke in the interview how Provincetown's spirit of freedom and experimentation had stimulated him for decades. His 1984 murder mystery, *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, is set there. Chris was an extra in the film version. Mailer said that he wrote about half of three-fourths of his 44 books in his third floor study over-

looking the swerve of shore and bend of bay of Provincetown's beautiful harbor. Provincetown, he said, "is the freest town in America . . . a town you could see yourself digging in and fighting for." Just before his death, Mailer's interview with me, one of his last, appeared in the 2007 issue.

Here's a list to the list of some of the other writers and artists who have been featured in or written for *PA*: Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Fritz Bultman, Robert Motherwell, Stanley Kunitz, Mary Oliver (who worked for Mailer in the 1970s, and typed *The Executioner's Song*), Tony Kushner, May Swenson, Norris Church Mailer, John Buffalo Mailer, Danielle Mailer, Elizabeth Mailer, Susan Mailer, Tony Vevers, Tabitha Vevers, Jhumpa Lahiri, Roger Skillings, John Waters, Nick Flynn, Joel Meyerowitz, Paul Resika, Anne Bernays, Gail Mazur, Michael Mazur, Philip Brady, Alan Dugan, Rosanna Warren, Seamus Heaney, B. H. Freidman, Mira Schor, Hilary Masters, Maria Howe, Taylor Polites, Eileen Myles, Anne Packard, Sebastian Junger, Elizabeth McCracken, Salvatore Scibona, Grace Paley, Mark Doty, and Annie Dillard. Impressive roster, and this is just a sampling.

It is fair and just to call Christopher Busa Provincetown's Boswell. Salud!