

get elected. I think it was only a week before the election I realized I was not going to.

**Legs:** Was it funny to you, the idea of you running for mayor?

**Norman:** That was the newspapers' idea. There was nothing fun about it. It's the hardest, most boring work I ever did in my life. First of all, Breslin doesn't like to work hard any more than I do, and it meant getting up at six in the morning and shaking a thousand hands before breakfast, which probably was the best part of the whole job. Because you could feel better at the end of it than when you started, and what that meant was there was more goodness than evil in the thousand hands you were shaking. It was a phenomenon. Nine days out of ten you'd shake a thousand hands and feel better. That part was okay.

I had to make the same speech ten times a day, however. You get awfully bored hearing your own voice. To this day I can smell and taste my own spit because of running for mayor ten years ago. And you get bored with yourself, very bored with yourself. It's terrible.

**Legs:** Are you glad you didn't win?

**Norman:** No, I wanted to win. You don't like losing. It does something funny to your ego forever. And there was a kind of, what can I say? You worked from six in the morning till midnight, two in the morning. At the end of the day you're stuck with your staff that you looked at every day for two months. You're sick of looking at them and they're sick of looking at you. It's airless and boring and very hard work. I'd never run again unless I was ready to die for the idea. And that's the only reason to get into politics if you're not a pro. Be ready to live in the very center of your idea.

## POSTSCRIPT: PUNK ROCK MEETS THE GODFATHER OF LETTERS

MICHAEL L. SHUMAN

WHEN PROTO-PUNK LEGS MCNEIL FIRST MET NORMAN MAILER in Martha Thomases' apartment in 1979, Legs had no idea that he would be curating a new audience for the iconic author who had just published *The Executioner's*

*Song*. Mailer, whose norm-defying literary work has a punk attitude all its own, accepted McNeil's invitation to see the buzzsaw guitar band Ramones along with Shrapnel, a group McNeil managed, at The Policeman's Bullet Proof Vest Benefit, a charitable event at the raucous New York City punk venue CBGB. Mailer showed up at the club in the memorable way that McNeil describes in his prefatory note, apparently drawing attention away from the regular leather jacket and safety-pin crowd and toward a middle-aged author and his stunning companion and later wife, Norris Church.

Mailer attended the after-show party, too, and as the gathering grew increasingly inebriated, Mailer asked Legs to interview him at his Brooklyn Heights apartment the next day. McNeil's website, *Please Kill Me* (<https://pleasekillme.com/norman-mailer-legs/>), describes his interview arrangement with Mailer a bit differently, decades later, than McNeil recounts here, in his original *High Times* headnote. McNeil, in a moment perhaps defining the punk-rock lifestyle, woke up the next morning with a hangover and some girl but no memory of the serendipitous interview appointment. His afterparty friends remembered, though, and pestered him to reschedule. The resulting interview, a wide-ranging dialogue illuminating Mailer's thoughts on important issues and milestones in life, was published in the September 1979 issue of *High Times*, a magazine intended for an audience usually expecting mind-expanding features of a different type. McNeil soon became a frequent visitor to the Mailer's household, and *Rolling Stone*, a countercultural magazine covering the punk scene and appealing to the *High Times* audience, printed snarky "Random Notes" entries about Shrapnel's performances at Mailer parties and Mailer's impromptu wrestling match with McNeil.

*The Executioner's Song* spent 25 weeks on the bestseller list and won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1980. What small amount of this success resulted from that brief exposure to the *High Times* pot-head audience is a matter for insoluble conjecture, but Mailer's appreciation for punk rock music and a new base of fringe-culture friends is undeniable, lasting experiences he could draw upon while producing his later genre-bending works.