

RISE ABOVE IT

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YOU'LL NEVER REGRET TAKING THE HIGH ROAD.

The first time I heard Norris say this we were in the living room in Brooklyn Heights a few months after Norman died. She was telling me her early ideas for a memoir. She had all these stories—the story about first meeting Norman in Arkansas, the story about going to a dinner party at Oscar de la Renta's in a nightgown, the story about dressing up as a stripper named Cinnamon Brown. Then she landed on a story about one of Norman's "old girlfriends," as she put it. One evening the woman insulted Norris at a party, looking for a catfight that would land her in the gossip pages. Norris didn't bite. That's when she said, "David, you'll never regret taking the high road."

If you're an editor assessing the potential of a memoir, what do you suppose you're looking for? Of course you want candor, depth, and self-awareness. But you also want a little juice. If a writer says *You'll never regret taking the high road*—what is your likely reaction? The high road might be nice for personal relations and family harmony, but will it lead to a fascinating book? Will the high road take a writer to the best stories, like hooking up with Bill Clinton and the painful truths of marital acrimony?

You might have this concern, but not if you're sitting on Norris Church Mailer's worn sofa and looking into her worn, wise eyes. There, surrounded by the books and the photos and the memories, you'll realize the high road will not overlook the hard dirty business of living. The high road will lead a writer like Norris—and all of us—to what's most important in life: love.

A Ticket to the Circus is about family and fame and books and sex, but above all it's about love. About loving people when they impress you and when they fail you. About loving friends and not letting foes sap your ability to love. About loving the world you are blessed to live in and the gifts you have been given and loving others whose gifts you sometimes wished you

had. Norris loved life. I don't mean that in the vague, sentimental sense. No, she loved *her* life. She loved her family, her friends, her homes, her talents, her experiences. She loved her *days*. On that cold afternoon in Brooklyn Heights she understood she wouldn't have too many more of those days. She wasn't bitter, she wasn't regretful and she definitely wasn't seeking revenge. She was sad of course and perhaps frightened but more than anything she was full of love. They say an artist's greatness can be measured by her capacity to love. Norris showed me that if you're an editor looking for a great book, start by assessing the amount of love in a writer's ink.