



The Virgin of Bennington

Kathleen Norris

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Shy and sheltered as a young woman, Kathleen Norris wasn't prepared for the sex, drugs, and bohemianism of Bennington College in the late 1960s—and when she moved to New York City after graduation, it was a case of out of the frying pan and into the fire. In this chronicle, Norris remembers the education she received, both formal and fortuitous; the influence of her mentor Betty Kray, who shunned the spotlight while serving as a guiding force in the poetry world of the late 20th century; her encounters with such figures as James Merrill, Jim Carroll, Denise Levertov, Stanley Kunitz, Patti Smith, and Erica Jong; and her eventual decision to leave Manhattan for the less-crowded landscape she described so memorably in Dakota. This account of the making of a young writer will resonate with anyone who has stumbled bravely into a bigger world and found the poetry that lurks on rooftops and in railroad apartments—and with anyone who has enjoyed the blessings of inspiring teachers and great friends.

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