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Publishing Luminaries Gather for Second Annual Benefit for Norman Mailer Center and Writers Colony

by **Patricia Bosworth** of Vanity Fair

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Jann Wenner and Tom Wolfe speak at the Norman Mailer Center 2nd Annual Benefit Gala at Cipriani 42nd Street. *Photo by Stephen Lovekin/Getty Images for Norman Mailer Center*

The abrasive energizing spirit of Norman Mailer enveloped the Cipriani 42nd Street last evening as family, friends, and colleagues of Norman packed into the great domed ballroom to celebrate the second annual benefit for the Norman Mailer Center and Writers Colony.....

.....I was seated next to Larry Schiller, the flamboyant dynamo who two years ago co-founded the Norman Mailer Center and Writers Colony, housed in Norman's home in Provincetown, with Norman's widow, Norris Church Mailer. Each summer the colony offers fellowships to young writers in fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. For a month they can write there and discuss their work with established writers; there are workshops, readings, and seminars. To date the Center has awarded 16 fellowships and 150 writers have received scholarships. In 2011, the Center will offer an international study program to young writers from around the world.

Periodically our conversation was interrupted by awards presentations. Jann Wenner, the publisher of *Rolling Stone* magazine, received an award for Lifetime Achievement in Magazine Publishing. He was introduced by a drawling Tom Wolfe in his trademark white suit.

For me the high point of the evening was listening to the last two award recipients: a lifetime achievement prize went to Orhan Pamuk, Turkey's best-known, best-selling novelist, and winner of the 2006 Nobel Prize in Literature. A champion of free speech at a time when insulting Turkish identity can be a criminal offense, he has fought with Islamists and nationalists alike and often risked his life to speak out. So has Ruth Gruber, age 99, who won the distinguished journalism award. Reporter, photographer, author of 19 books, she was the first foreign correspondent to interview prisoners in the Soviet Gulag; after World War II she traveled all over Europe investigating the terrible conditions in refugee camps and then reporting it to the world.

Neither of these writers understands limitations. Both have been fascinated by brutality and courage and written on these subjects with eloquence. They have pushed themselves to be the best, very much like Mailer, who always thought of writing as a heroic enterprise.

After the dinner, I went over to congratulate Ruth, whom I have known since I was a little girl. "Ruth," I said, "what does it feel like to be 99 years old?" Ruth is tiny and delicate. She smiled and in a soft little voice said, "Oh, Patti, being 99 feels just like being 98."