

## **In Memoriam**

**Nora Faires**

**1949-2011**

Nora Faires died on February 6, 2011, at the age of sixty-one, from metastatic breast cancer. Nora was diagnosed and treated for the illness in 1996, and it was her constant companion during the rest of her life, which she nonetheless managed to live out with impressive productivity, admirable bravery, and incredible gusto, despite the rigors of subsequent treatment.

Nora Faires's parents migrated to western Pennsylvania from Ontario's hardscrabble Muskoka district in the 1930s and settled in Sharpsville, where her father worked on the railroad. A bright and earnest young woman, Nora graduated from the University of Pittsburgh and continued on in the history doctoral program there. The razing of one of city's neighborhoods piqued her interest in the history of the city's German community. Having an interest in religion acquired in her youth and German-language skills learned in high school, Faires embarked on a doctoral project on German immigrant sectarianism under the direction of Professor Samuel P. Hays.

Matriculating in the difficult academic job market of the late 1970s and early 1980s, Faires held term appointments at the University of Puget Sound and the University of Texas at Arlington, then in 1982 accepted a regular tenure-track position in History and Women's Studies at the University of Michigan-Flint, where she rose to the rank of associate professor and served as director of the Master of Liberal Studies Program in American Culture (1984-87), Coordinator of the Women's and Gender Studies Program (1997-99), and Department chair (1996-99). Shifting fortunes at Flint caused her to move to Western Michigan University in 2000, where she became a prime mover in

efforts to develop the field of Canadian Studies at that institution and, in 2007, won promotion to Professor of History and of Gender and Women's Studies.

In former times, Nora would have been referred to praisefully as a "yeoman historian." A conscientious and hardworking colleague, diligent researcher, and graceful writer, Nora co-authored or co-edited four books in her sadly foreshortened life and career. Her books included *Permeable Border: The Great Lakes Basin as Transnational Region, 1650-1990* (with John J. Bukowczyk, David R. Smith, and Randy William Widdis); *Jewish Life in the Industrial Promised Land, 1855-2005* (with Nancy Hanflik); *A History of Women in America* (with Janet L. Coryell); and *Migrants and Migration in Modern North America: Cross-Border Life Courses, Labor Markets, and Politics in Canada, the Caribbean, Mexico, and the United States* (coedited with Dirk Hoerder). She also co-edited two issues of the *Michigan Historical Review* on "Borderlands," which seemed an especial labor of love, as she regularly returned to a family cottage in Ontario, a log cabin on Lake Muskoka. This impressive output, much of it accomplished while coping with the illness that eventually robbed her of her life, earned her the nearly singular distinction of winning two American Historical Association publication prizes, the first, the 1995 William Gilbert Award for the Best Article on Teaching History for "The American Family and the Little Red Schoolhouse: Historians, Class, and the Problem of Curricular Diversity" (co-authored with John J. Bukowczyk), published in *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies*; and the second, the 2006 Albert B. Corey Prize (biennial), awarded jointly with the Canadian Historical Association for the best book on Canadian-American relations or the history of both countries, for *Permeable Border*. The latter also won the 2008 Nominee (third place) Award from the Association for Borderland Studies, while her *Jewish Life in the Industrial Promised Land, 1855-*

2005 won a 2006 State History Award from the Historical Society of Michigan in the category of Books from a University or Commercial Press.

A woman of discipline and resolve, even as it became obvious that her months were numbered, Nora remained at her desk, completing work on the collection she was co-editing with Dirk Hoerder and trying to finish an article tentatively titled “Locating Freedom in Space and Memory: Race, Migration, and the International Underground Railroad Memorial in Detroit, Michigan, and Windsor, Ontario,” and a book manuscript titled “The Splintered Cross: Religion and Ideology among German Immigrants in Nineteenth-Century Pittsburgh.” Her time in this life ran out before she could accomplish either of these. At the time of her death, Nora also was working on two other projects which she could not complete, a book on American Woman’s Clubs overseas as sites of civic, sojourner, nationalist, and internationalist identities and practices during the twentieth century.

Many of the photographs of Nora in recent years depict her in various scenic locations in North America and Western Europe. She held two Fulbrights, the 2000-01 Fulbright Distinguished Chair in North American Studies at University of Calgary and the 2007-08 Fulbright Distinguished Chair at York University, both in Canada, and was a tireless conference presenter. But in hindsight, perhaps the most telling and prescient image of Nora was an uncaptioned *Time-Life* news photo, taken in September 1971, which captured her, as a young Pitt grad student, in the foreground of a small, impromptu demonstration in Pittsburgh protesting President Gerald Ford’s pardon of Richard Nixon. True to and proud of her own working-class roots, Nora was throughout her life a supporter of a variety of progressive political and social causes which she stood up for with courage and integrity. Nora also was, throughout her life, active in the

professional associations. She was an early member of the Immigration History Society (later renamed the Immigration and Ethnic History Society), which years later she referred to as her “professional home.” At the time of her death, Nora still maintained membership in nearly twenty organizations, including the AAUP, the AHA, the ASA, the CHA, LAWCHA, the OAH, the SSHA, SHEAR, SHGAPE, the UHA, the Association for Borderland Studies, the Historical Society of Michigan, the Michigan Women’s Studies Association, and the Society for German-American Studies. Remarkably she was active in several of these.

Nora was a concerned and stimulating teacher and a caring mentor to her undergraduate advisees, graduate students, and to younger colleagues. Her teaching breadth was impressive, offering during her career over twenty different courses. In her various professional activities, Nora gathered a huge circle of personal and professional friends, who will remember and miss her integrity, political principle, sense of humor, intelligence, tenacity, vigor, and uncommon decency as a human being. Nora was predeceased by her beloved sister (and co-author), Nancy Faires Conklin of Portland, Oregon, who also died of breast cancer. She is survived by a brother and sister-in-law, both also academics; and a niece of whom she was especially fond. The legion of friends who mourn and miss her and cherish her memory may make memorial contributions to the Southern Poverty Law Center, a non-profit Nora and her sister supported throughout their professional lives.

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