

AVON NEAL

AVON NEAL was born in Morgantown, Indiana, on July 16, 1922. He was elected to membership in the American Antiquarian Society in October 1998, and actively participated in the library's affairs until his death, on December 18, 2003. He was a magical presence wherever he was. Outdoors or indoors he was never without a navy blue beret on his head, and his favorite warm weather footgear was a pair of sandals fashioned from discarded rubber tires by Indians he knew. He liked blue jeans and tweed jackets, slightly threadbare. He had his own uniform, which worked elegantly everywhere. He was a physical fellow with the body of a gymnast. He was modest, shy, intense, and friendly. He spoke with intimacy, compellingly. His accent was clear and clipped, like his tidy beard. He was a romantic figure who, without trying, charmed and engaged whom-ever he was with: little children to public personages.

Avon studied at Long Beach College in California and the Rhode Island School of Design. He received a B.F.A. from Yale University and an M.F.A. from Escuela de Bellas Artes in Mexico. He married the famous photographer Ann Parker in 1964, and they became a rare unit. Their names, Ann and Avon, came off the tongues of their friends as one. Avon was devoted to Ann and gave her his muscles and his time. He supplied all the words for a rich variety of articles, exhibitions, and especially books: handsome big books about folk art, Cuna Indians scarecrows, gravestone art of Colonial America, itinerant photographers of Guatemala, and, most recently, the paintings associated with the Hajj Pilgrimage. Avon's manner was unfailingly attentive, courtly, and fun. Together he and Ann moved about the world with curiosity and appreciation. They had an excitement about life that was contagious. They had a home in the Dominican Republic, a vacant lot in California, a renovated railroad station in North Brookfield, and nearby an old farm called Thistle Hill, where each spring Avon claimed to tap every tree in sight, including telephone poles, for sap.

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