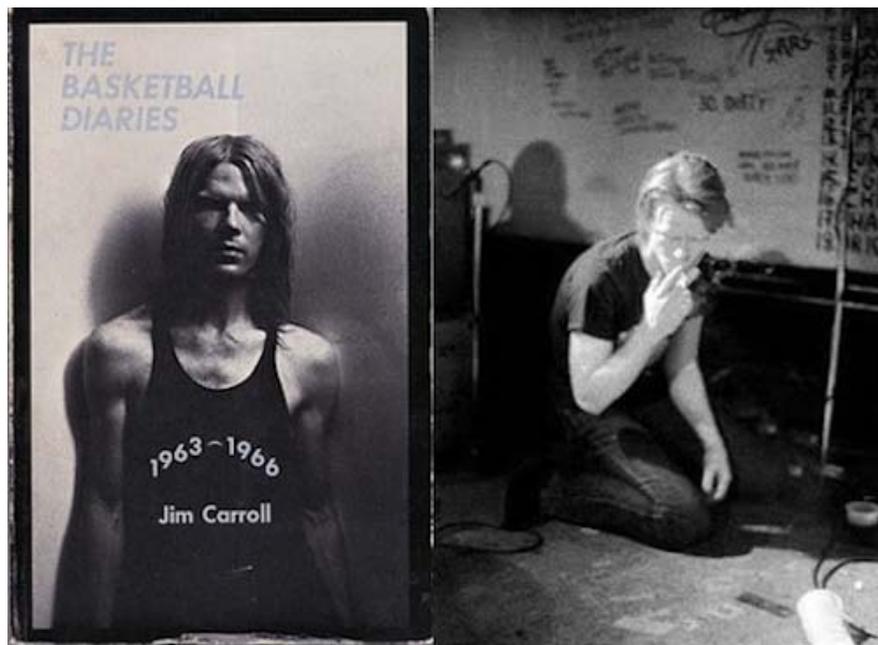


Jim Carroll :: August 1, 1950 — September 11, 2009

Published on Monday, September 14th, 2009 at 1:19 am



They don't really make artists like [Jim Carroll](#) anymore – that time has passed. Born in 1950 in New York City, Jim was undoubtedly a product of both the Beat influence on American culture and punk's ramshackle ethics. Carroll's writing and his music were twin forces that clawed and raked at an urban existence that had been both his bane and his muse. He stood alongside Patti Smith as one of the punk era's true poets – and as much as music came after his writing, he was elegantly skilled at both. Jim Carroll died Friday at the age of 60. Below is the AD piece about arguably his most famous song, “*People Who Died*.” Rest in peace, Jim. Catch up with your friends. They've been waiting

Under The Covers :: People Who Died



Context is everything. And sometimes it's the mere shift of geography, the slighter or greater roar of the narrator that can make the biggest difference in a song.

[Jim Carroll's](#) “*People Who Died*” is a legendary song all its own. Originally released on 1980's [Catholic Boy](#), “*People Who Died*” runs through a litany of deceased friends – suicides, ODs, murders, war dead and disease victims – as it scampers across the body-strewn landscape of 70s New York. But despite the occasional twinges of genuine anguish that come through in Carroll's voice, “*People Who Died*” sounds like something more factual than mournful. Perhaps it's in the way that several verses are repeated – lives recounted again within the same song. Here these lives become just a recounting of experience. Emotions expressed (“...and Eddie, I miss you more than all the others / and I salute you brother”) become simply a world-weary incantation – a recitation that gives away its narrator's acceptance of the reality. It's a delivery befitting Jim Carroll given his experiences. There comes a point where another death is just another death. It doesn't mean

the people didn't mean anything, but you can only take so much pain in a lifetime. Sometimes, it just can't hurt anymore.

[The Drive-by Truckers](#) have long made "*People Who Died*" a staple of their live shows. If you go back to 1999's sadly out-of-print *Alabama Ass Whuppin'*, the early line-up of the band tears through the song with abandon. Muddling the verse order, and shuffling and adjusting lyrics as he goes, [Patterson Hood's](#) delivery of the song is a howling maelstrom of grief. There are times where his vocals become muttered and incoherent, others where the pain is howled into the Plutonian shore. Imagining the narrator now in the small towns of the deep South, where friends are people you've known since you were born, not just the guy you met hustling on the street the other week, the deaths rack up in a much more serious way. As friends drop left and right, everything that seemed true is revealed in the harsh light of reality. The guitars, thick and raspy, convey something much more guttural and deeply troubling than the skittish chug of Carroll's original. You can only take so much pain in a lifetime. Sometimes, it just can't hurt any less. words/ [j. neas](#)

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3 Responses to "Jim Carroll :: August 1, 1950 — September 11, 2009"

1. I haven't really thought about Jim Carroll in a long time (I first read Basketball Diaries when I was very young and it really hit me — one f@#% of a book!). Anyway, I was reading through September's Paste Mag today, and Andy Whitman discussed Catholic Boy and how the album "deserved the Punk Pulitzer, an award that doesn't exist. It should." And then the news. My impression is that there's a great deal of surprise that he lived to see 60. I don't know, I saw him give a reading twenty years ago, and although in rough shape at the time, he was obviously a resilient soul. Well, great post, and ruminations on this particular song. Hmmm. I like the idea of a Punk Pulitzer even more now!

"I salute you brother"

[1](#) / [Mr. TRONA](#) September 14th, 2009 at 3:13 am

2. The news saddens me. "The Basketball Diaries" has had a lasting effect on my life, as has Jim's music and poetry. His cataloging of his addiction and, ultimately, his triumph over drug use is/was an inspiring story.

Rest in peace.

[2](#) / [Carole](#) September 14th, 2009 at 2:15 pm

3. I SALUTE YOU, BROTHER!

[3](#) / [perrata2000](#) September 14th, 2009 at 8:23 pm

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