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Monday, September 14, 2009

Jim Carroll, RIP

Jim Carroll, RIP By johnmac

September 14, 2009

Jim Carroll, poet and rocker, is dead.

I have read most of his poetry and am saddened that his skill has been taken from us. We have lost a voice.

He was also from my old neighborhood, Inwood, the garden spot of upper Manhattan, and deepens the sadness – even greater because, although I didn't know him personally, many of my friends did and they now mourn him so I am further saddened.

He was also younger than I am and, when you're in your sixties, death is a scary son-of-a-bitch,

But, most of all, I am sad because Jim taught me something and I never had a chance to meet him and say "Thanks".

In my youth, our sins were drinking and smoking. Anyone who used illegal narcotics were either "dope fiends" (a popular expression

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at the time) or musicians. Our fathers drank and both of our parents smoked. This was being grown up!

So we, as “kids” did dumb things. I started smoking at twelve (12!), drinking beer in the park at 14 or 15 and in bars at 16 – the legal age in New York was eighteen (18) at the time so we could start younger.

These “dumb things” of our youth killed some of us – cirrhosis of the liver; lung cancer – and led some to AA. Many said they would “drink until they died” - and they did.

(Personal Note – My freshman year in college, I was a BB major (“Beer and Basketball”) and my stellar performance entitled me to a position on “The Dean’s Other List” I turned it around a good deal but still spent the next many years with my jump shot and the bar stool having a very high level of importance).

But we weren’t fucking junkies! We were better than that! Or so we thought.

It was only after I left the Inwood scene that illegal narcotics really hit the neighborhood.

Jim’s “Basketball Diaries” was a revelation. Here was a young man who loved to read and loved basketball (hey, that’s me) and did drugs.

Why? Because he was just as dumb as we were at his age and the only drugs that we had available were nicotine and



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alcohol. When he hit our age, he had another choice – and he took it – as I might have.

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“Wait”, you say. “Drugs are illegal. There is a difference!”

Psst – it was illegal to be drinking eighteen cans of beer in the park at 17; it was illegal to jump over the subway turnstiles. It was illegal to sit in “Erin’s Isle” at 17, on my tenth beer, Dumb kids do dumb things.

Dumb kids do dumb things – and some change as they get older and hopefully smarter – and some don’t. According to most, Jim did change. He had success; the making of “Basketball Diaries” into a movie brought him great publicity.

and his book helped me understand and I thank him for that. I thank him for writing about “God’s Country” (Inwood) and I thank him for sharing his talent with all of us.

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posted by johnmac at [5:27 PM](#) 


3 Comments:

John,
You're not quite a generation from me yet your words rang true for my teen years as well as those of today's kids. Hopefully, as all parent hope, this lifestyle will skip my children's lives. We shall see.
Frank M


By  [asiaerin](#), at [2:46 PM](#)

I went to grammar school with Jim, but only through 3rd grade when boys and girls were separated. But we often hung out together in the park or pizza place or later on in the bar. Like most from the neighborhood The Basketball Diaries brought some chuckles when he referred to someone we knew whose name was changed. Although I didn't partake in

Jim's drug of choice, I married someone who did, and could always understand the whys and wherefores. Many of us were creative and I was glad to have known such a survivor and creator. May he now Rest.

By  [Mary](#), at [3:54 PM](#)

There is a very good Patti Smith PBS interview about Jim -- <http://tinyurl.com/kq4awr>

By  [johnmac](#), at [2:58 PM](#)

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