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“Basketball Diaries” Author, Punk Icon Jim Carroll Dead at 60

9/14/09, 10:03 am EST



Photo: Serban/Getty

Poet and punk rocker Jim Carroll, whose life story was famously documented in his autobiography *The Basketball Diaries*, died following a heart attack on Friday, September 11th in New York City. Carroll

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was 60, [the New York Times reports](#). *The Basketball Diaries* — which detailed Carroll’s struggles with drug use as a teenager in the 1960s — depicts his fall from prep school basketball star to heroin addict who turned to prostitution, all before Carroll was even 17 years old. Leonardo DiCaprio portrayed Carroll in the 1995 film version of the book. Besides *Basketball*, Carroll’s other notable works include *4 Ups and 1 Down* and 1973’s *Living at the Movies*.

After establishing himself as a poet, Carroll next turned to music, coaxed in part by his friend Patti Smith. Carroll caught the eye of the Rolling Stones’ Keith Richards, who helped the Jim Carroll Band secure a three-record deal. Their first album, 1980’s *Catholic Boy*, is considered a landmark of the New York punk scene. Carroll followed the debut with two more LPs, 1982’s *Dry Dreams* and 1983’s *I Write Your Name*, then released a fourth album, *Pools of Mercury*, in 1998.

The soundtrack for the *Basketball Diaries* film also found Carroll collaborating with Pearl Jam on a new version of his song “Catholic Boy.” Carroll’s “People Who Died,” a *Catholic Boy* ode to Carroll’s friends who died too soon, also featured on the soundtrack of Steven Spielberg’s *E.T.*

“I met him in 1970, and already he was pretty much universally recognized as the best poet of his generation,” Patti Smith told the *New York Times* this weekend. “The work was sophisticated and elegant. He had beauty.” *Rolling Stone* spoke with Jim Carroll in 1999 following the release of *Pools of Mercury*, when Carroll discussed his songwriting process, *Basketball*’s impact, the death of beat poets Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs and meeting Kurt Cobain. Read our interview with Jim Carroll below:

- [Jim Carroll Can’t Escape Rock & Roll](#)

Carroll also contributed an untitled poem to the pages of *Rolling Stone*, which we have reprinted here:

It’s sad this vision required such height.
I’d have preferred to be down with the others, in
the stadium.
They know the terror of birds.
I am left, instead, with the deep drone...
The urgency to deliver light, as if it
were some news from the far galaxies.

[From Issue 321 — July 10, 1980]

Daniel Kreps

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Comments

Lee Ann | 9/14/2009, 10:15 am EST

‘People Who Died’ is one of the best songs of the 80s, and Jim Carroll was a true poet—he’ll be missed.

Juan Mugrero | 9/14/2009, 10:27 am EST

R.I.P. Jim!

pablo | 9/14/2009, 10:42 am EST

Catholic Boy is still in heavy rotation on my ipod!

Keith DeLancey | 9/14/2009, 11:05 am EST

Jim ~ we salute you brutha!

Jeff | 9/14/2009, 11:13 am EST

RIP Jim! Thanks for the inspiration...

stattar | 9/14/2009, 11:41 am EST

Thank you for letting us into your soul and sharing your scars with little to no edits. You inspired me. I salute you my brother.

Eric Norgaarden | 9/14/2009, 12:16 pm EST

Jim Carroll’s Catholic Boy album is one of the most underrated of the entire 1980s decade. The college radio station I DJ’d at gave it ample airplay in the early 1980s. A very memorable and inspiring record. Jim was an urban poet with soul. R.I.P.

StrummerJones | 9/14/2009, 12:17 pm EST

He’s always been an inferior Patti Smith, but that’s just saying he’s in good company. Every cliché indicates that People Who Died will be in rotation today around campus.

Dean Wien | 9/14/2009, 12:18 pm EST

When The Doors reformed with Ian Astbury from The Cult, they were going to record a brand new Doors album/CD, and Jim Carrol was one of the writers. He actually wrote one song for the album entitled “Cops Talk” which I’ve seen The Doors perform at Roseland in New York. Jim Carrol’s was also going to originally be released on The Rolling Stone’s label, but was eventually released on ATCO.

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Marina Gipps | 9/14/2009, 12:23 pm EST

Rest in Peace, Jim Carroll...

DeanWien | 9/14/2009, 12:28 pm EST

When The Doors reunited with The Cult's Ian Astbury, they were going to record a new album/CD. One of the writers was Jim Carrol. He wrote a song entitled "Cops Talk". I've seen The Doors perform this song at Roseland in New York City. Jim Carrol's album Catholic Boy was originally going to be released on The Rolling Stones label, but was released on ATCO.

Heather | 9/14/2009, 12:34 pm EST

My favorite poet of all time~
You will be missed.

SCUBA22 | 9/14/2009, 12:52 pm EST

Salute U Brother

John | 9/14/2009, 1:31 pm EST

Among the many punk bands of that era, The Jim Carroll Band has always held a special appeal for me. RIP Jim.

bandon | 9/14/2009, 2:18 pm EST

RIP my man. We'll miss you in Philly.

Jim | 9/14/2009, 2:35 pm EST

Everyone always talks about 'People Who Died', which is a great song. But my favorite from Catholic Boy has always been 'It's Too Late' with the classic first line 'It's too late to fall in love with Sharon Tate'. I bought this album in 1980 and I still love it.

wilbill | 9/14/2009, 2:37 pm EST

These are people who have died
RIP to the dog man of Bolinas

Ray | 9/14/2009, 2:43 pm EST

Are the poems at the end of this article supposed to be identical?

Joe Hartmann | 9/14/2009, 3:00 pm EST

You gave us your heart but we wanted some fashion show

Joe Hartmann | 9/14/2009, 3:01 pm EST

You gave us your heart but we wanted some fashion show

Robby | 9/14/2009, 3:09 pm EST

As is so often the case, the song that received all the airplay (“People Who Died”) was the worst song on Catholic Boy. Carroll was about lyrics that mattered, and as such, his music mattered to me at a level that Ramones and Pistols never could touch. You want a song with an exquisite sense of longing? Check out “Rooms,” the next to last song on “I Write Your Name.”

Mark | 9/14/2009, 3:15 pm EST

RIP Jim. Your work had genuine beauty and elegance, perhaps more so than any writer of your generation. You were the real thing; a rebel, adolescent voice screaming out against it all. I will never forget the lines:

These are the words of a man who poisoned
his own faith. Who made the tree a leper,
where no season begins or ends. Vanity. Pride.
A heart, once wild,
now half
devoured.

a heart once wild
now half devoured

Trooper | 9/14/2009, 5:22 pm EST

When I hear “People Who Died” it makes me think of my own friends, co-workers and cohorts who have died at early ages. A great expression of frustration and sadness. Also, Jim was a terrific poet who exposed his soul in full glare. Jim, I’ll miss you like all the others and I salute you brotha!

nick I | 9/14/2009, 7:36 pm EST

toronto mid 1980s lee’s palace silver dollar your
presence your character never gone always
remembered i hope you found peace my brother
you were the best.

TK | 9/14/2009, 8:55 pm EST

I write your name forever.
Pat Swayze too. Point Break forever.
sad day.. damn

dlt | 9/14/2009, 9:10 pm EST

Rolling w/ the Stones

Sat around before Risky Business Tom Cruise, in my sister’s old bedroom, w/ Jack Kerouac bottle on table, listening to psychedelic Eric Burdon, pre-Velvets Lou Reed, Jim Carroll’s Catholic Boy and Dry Dreams.

I’d never hung out w/ my sister’s boring, seventies rock cronies. I’d stopped hanging w/ my sister.

Went to Trenton NJ that rainy afternoon w/ musician friend—he’d arranged the audition—Rog, walked Gregory Corso streets, “feminine and tuff,” played solid chords, sang slippery melody. (Rog noodled.)

What’s up at the Petting zoo? I sent you my zygotes knowing they weren’t ready

Orgo | 9/14/2009, 10:02 pm EST

My first memory of Jim Carroll was seeing him in Tuff Turf(with Robert Downey Jr in his band behind the drumkit)doing It’s Too Late and Voices. Wasn’t till much later I got Catholic Boy and man,I gave that album a good thrashing after I bought it. It’s Too Late,People Who Died and the title track are classics indeed,but my fave track on it’s Three Sisters. Catholic Boy’s an album I’ve come back to time and again since I bought it,as well as becoming an all-time fave album of mine.In fact,I only dug it out a couple of weeks ago and once I found out about his passing,I made sure to crank it up in his memory. Cheers Jim!

Cathy P. | 9/14/2009, 10:51 pm EST

A sad day...a poet with the courage to honor the words and himself all at the same time...rest in peace Jim...

Dennis Spencer | 9/14/2009, 11:58 pm EST

In 1978 I lived at the Chelsea Hotel in New York City. One afternoon I heard a knock on my door. When I opened it there stood a tall, drugged out looking, skinny guy about my age with stringy red hair. With him were two other guys that were larger and even scarier looking than him.

With a fast talking New York accent and a desperate tone the red headed one held up an LP and blasted into this rapid fire sales pitch:
“Listen, I know you don’t know me but my name is Jim Carroll and I have a band called The Jim Carroll Band and I am

on Rolling Stones
Records and Tapes. I have a single coming out next
month called
“People Who Died”. I just this minute got back from
England and what I
have here in my hand is a copy of the new Rolling
Stones album called
“Some Girls”. This THE ONLY COPY THAT EXISTS IN
THE UNITED STATES. I
haven’t even heard it. Nobody has heard it, not one
single person in
the U.S. has heard it, but YOU can be the first. My
only question to
you is: DO YOU HAVE A STEREO?”
Now wait a second, yes I had a stereo, a very nice
one as a matter of
fact. More importantly I also had a fair amount of
drugs in my room
that took a whole day of hustling to get and I
wasn’t about to let
this trio of losers bust into my room and take my
shit. The album did
look authentic though with the Rolling Stones logo
and the red-head’s
story had a ring of authenticity so I let them in.
As everyone knows the first song on the album is
“Miss You” which
begins that opening line “nah nah nah nanana” in
falsetto. We all had
a hard time figuring out if I had the turntable set at
the right speed
but of course I did. We then listened to both sides
of this fabulous
album and it was of course, great.
On the way out Jim flipped a paper back book to
me which of course was
“Basketball Diaries” and said: “Check it out, this is
the story of my
life. One day you can say you met me.”
Now I am glad to say that I did.

beauty | 9/15/2009, 1:28 am EST

my daughter, elizabeth, was a friend of jim’s...he
wrote of her in the book of nods...the poem is
titled: for elizabeth..she died @ seventeen in
1981...she was a san francisco punk musician who
played bass with the offs...i called him when she
died...theyre most likely playing some music right
now, and howling some poems.

Lew | 9/15/2009, 4:50 am EST

Jim Carroll.Your poetry and songs always meant
alot to me,still do and always will.I’m glad you
were there on my journey.
This is always for you my brother!

tim | 9/15/2009, 5:40 am EST

damn, just found out about JC. all the good ones are gone (almost).
i'm going out on the roof to masturbate and look at the stars

John Sorkness | 9/15/2009, 9:30 am EST

I couldn't believe it when I read that JIM CARROLL had died. I have read his story, read the book *Rhe Basketball Diaries* way back in the 90s. That book was great and then the movie..WOW!!! He is a great Talent and will be sorely missed.
R.I P brother

Leslie Orion | 9/15/2009, 10:16 am EST

So sad he's gone. I was fortunate enough to see him one evening at the Lion's Lair in Denver. I was entranced watching him recite poems and short stories. When he was finished, someone shouted, "Encore!" Jim picked up his things, turned to the audience and muttered, "That was the [expletive] encore," and walked off. To some that may have seemed abrupt and rude. But I think to everyone that was there, it was the perfect end to the night. We've definitely lost someone special.

Bill Cutler | 9/15/2009, 1:18 pm EST

This is a big loss. Jim Carroll was a truly gifted poet. My punk band, Nu-Models, played on the bill with the Jim Carroll Band at a club called The Back Dor in San Francisco in 1980 just as Jim's first album was being released. Jim was in his prime and sang all his great songs like "Catholic Boy" and "People Who Died". It was a memorable evening and we had big fun hanging out backstage. RIP Jim.

Bombshelter | 9/15/2009, 1:41 pm EST

Saw him at The Tin Angel in Philly around 1994...AMAZING! Made my then husband end our vacation in the Poconos & drive 2 hours back to Philly after I read in the City Paper that he'd be performing that night.

Billy | 9/15/2009, 4:07 pm EST

Seeing him frail in his later years, I sensed a dignity that I missed seeing earlier.

will | 9/15/2009, 4:40 pm EST

Yeah, well- so many other great posts. This is just another song to the seagull.

Bill Halliwell | 9/15/2009, 5:03 pm EST

R.I.P Jim, When the city drops into the night is one of the best songs ever..

my fam and friends hate kanye | 9/15/2009, 5:04 pm EST

do to how he acted all my family and friends that there family and friends will not listen nor ever suport kanye again i think that no apology will ever make up for what he did to that poor girl Talor s. she disnt deserve that. i know he would of caused a big ass seen if someone did that to him his first time getting an award he prob. hate that person and talk shit about them on his records but anyway he aint even all that good. what he needs to do is jump off a bridge and see jesus walk. cause he ceushed that poor girl thank goodness for Mrs.beyonce. shes such a sweetheart.!

Les | 9/15/2009, 6:56 pm EST

The Rabbit is gone. You were good Jim.

Ortho Stice | 9/15/2009, 9:04 pm EST

Basketball Diaries was the most important book I read during the most impressionable time of my life.

I still listen to at least one song from CATHOLIC BOY every week.

Jim was a prodigious talent. In a country that actually valued art instead of money and war, he would have been a national treasure.

Robert | 9/15/2009, 9:47 pm EST

It was the end of the first day of ninth grade – we were supposed to call it “form III” – and we were all getting on the bus to go to Central Park. There were no freshman teams that season, so even the guys like Ace and me who’d been on the football team last year were signed up for intramural touch football. Then this new kid climbed on the bus, one of the oddest looking kids I’d seen, because not just his hair but all the skin you could see was a bright orangey-red. Myself and a pair of my clownish smart-student buddies quickly dubbed him “The Red Kid”, but Eager had been in a class with him, I guess, and greeted him with “Irish to the back of the bus, Carroll!” That note of harsh Hibernian humor must have made him feel more at home at his new school, among the WASP,s and the Jews.

When we got to the ball field we chose up sides: Ace and I were the captains, and he picked Jimmy.

Evidently he was onto something. I was tallest and fastest on my team, and I thought I could cover anybody – I’d been playing football in the summer with Mickey Riley and Jimmy Behr, the last another red-headed Irishman despite his German name, and they were four years older. Carroll was several inches taller, though, and obviously well into puberty; he had the body of a true teen, while the rest of us were still boys. Ace played quarterback and Jimmy went out, faked me, cut left diagonally and got a step on me. The ball arrived in front of him; he caught it on the tips of the fingers of his left hand, froze it there, then brought it in softly to his palm. He wasn’t running hard, but he cruised in for a touchdown, jogging just ahead of my hands. His head was tilted down, face expressionless, not a word said. That scene was repeated several times that afternoon, and then, to my always mounting frustration, on every weekday throughout that fall, like a bad dream that I was trapped in. Not so long ago, down in Chelsea, Jimmy was laughing at me, his little falsetto laugh: “You could never cover me, with that one-handed catch. And you were so competitive, Robert!” He paused, and then he said, generously but not sadly, I think, “I bet you could cover me now.”

Robert | 9/15/2009, 10:21 pm EST

When I’d come to Trinity two years earlier Ace had been the king of the class, really, not much of a student but a tennis star – tennis being the top sport at the school – and the best at basketball and football, too. Besides that, he had an older brother in the school, so he knew everybody who mattered in the higher grades. But most importantly, he was sly; he always knew what was going on. Somehow he had gotten to know Jimmy right off, which wasn’t easy in those days, and he knew what his scene was. Being a ranked tennis player, he understood the world of serious junior athletics, so he knew what it meant that this shy new kid had been on the All-City Freshman team, had been recruited out of Rice. The rest of us didn’t have a clue. I told people I figured Jimmy would play J.V. for a year, but Ace told me I was crazy. But even Ace didn’t really get it, not fully. We three went down to the gym at lunch break; it was a huge, drafty, barn-like building, with a court two feet longer than regulation, for some mysterious reason. They must have been talking before I got there, because Ace had already bet Jimmy twenty dollars he couldn’t make five out of ten from midcourt. Midcourt! From there, against our old white wooden backboard, the red line of the rim looked like a tiny nick you might get shaving, if in fact any of us had needed to shave. Stock still on his tree-trunk legs, loose at the shoulders, Jimmy flicked his left wrist, shooting from near his chest. He missed one close, then swished five of the next six. He picked up the twenty. Ace and I realized

that we had just seen something outside of reasonable expectation. “Are you going to go pro?” Ace asked. “No,” said Jimmy, “I don’t have the desire.” He said it that way, using the sports cliché to achieve a near double meaning, as if he were formally distanced from himself, writing a scouting report, sarcastic, wistful, damning.

johnny acorn | 9/15/2009, 10:41 pm EST

“people who died ”
R.I.P.Jim Thanks

Robert | 9/15/2009, 11:12 pm EST

When basketball season started, the varsity looked to be pretty good. Despite his half-court display, which we two witnesses had underplayed, Jimmy was still an unknown quantity; our best guess was that he would be about as good as Steve Smith, big and fast with a soft touch, who had been an all-sports superstar in eighth grade when we were in seventh, and had then gone to Deerfield.

Still with us were a handful of rough seniors, one good sophomore, and a junior, Naceo Giles, who had been brought in the year before, and who was beautiful to see. His game was simple and elegant: it minimized his weaknesses, which were ball handling and improvisation, and built a perfect structure on his strengths: quickness, elevation and flawless form on his jump shot. Nace was a beautiful guy altogether, poised, cheerful, intelligent and extremely handsome. The one black kid in the upper school, he was friendly to everybody, even pipsqueaks like me, and was universally admired. The previous year he had taken a weak team and made it halfway decent. The first game of the year took place after J.V. practice, and my friends and I were going to shower and come back upstairs to watch. As always, I was the slowest, and when I got there Ace had already been sitting in the stacked bleachers for a while.

“You’ve got to see this ,” he said, “Jimmy’s going wild.”

What I saw was a different Jimmy from the one I knew, as if he had strapped on his six guns and been transformed. Our home uniform was white and gold, and he himself was shades of white and gold, a fringe of orange hair blowing off his forehead, spinning off the fulcrum where he felt the weight of his man leaning on him, playing the defenders for laughs, using them as comic props for flashing moves, long floating set shots, an array of mid-range jumpers and running hooks, look-away passes flicked behind his back off the dribble, which caught his stiff-fingered teammates by surprise. His point total was in the twenties, then the thirties, now, as the game was near ending, the forties. Ace, in the know as ever, told

me that the school record was forty-eight, by Rivera, the smaller member of the great Kosmeyer and Rivera tandem from ten years previous: we passed their team photo every day as we went to and from chapel on the grand white marble staircase. The coach, Dudley Maxim, who had been coaching for the past thirty years, sat Jimmy down near the end, when he had forty-five and the outcome of the game was not in doubt. We were giddy with excitement, and a kind of fancied patnership in the glory. We couldn't have imagined that he would never again try that hard for a whole thirty-two minutes, never care that much again. He had made his point. He only needed to show us once.

Robert | 9/16/2009, 12:55 am EST

The culture of Trinity in the sixties was still hard-core British boarding school: all boys, queer masters, uniforms, forms instead of grades, Anglican hymns, corporal punishment, unremitting competition for marks. Eight times a year, the better students had their grades posted in the school paper, and, at the end of the year, the top three in each form received large cash prizes. By the early seventies all that had been washed away, of course; and our class of 'sixty-eight had played some part in taking the starch out of the old place. Jimmy had been a very good student at Rice, and, some years before that, had been skipped a grade; but, even though now he had been made to repeat freshman year, he was to find that Trinity was in an altogether different league: much softer in sports, much harder in academics.

Except for geometry, there were faster and slower tracks in all the courses. Geometry we all had to take equally, and the classes were assigned at random. It was the only class that Jimmy and I had together in four years. He sat on my right, and my best fiend Nicky sat on my left.

Nicky had been, without serious rival, the most mocked and bullied boy in the school for the previous two years, for obvious reasons. He had wide hips and narrow shoulders – i.e., gynecoid – , his hair, glasses, clothes, tie and bookbag were in perpetual dismal disarray, and he was freakishly smart. Troops of boys would lay in wait for him, and then chase him down the underground corridors, calling out “We like NIcky! Nicky’s our friend!” They would smash his bookbag, scatter his books and papers. At such times, as he told me, he was therefore not impressed with the sincerity of their chant.

Nicky and I were math-crazy for a few years, with the tense enthusiasm of early adolescent rivals, playing math games, reading math books, multiplying large numbers in our heads, memorizing logarithmic tables and perfect squares. These borderline autistic antics were certainly not Jimmy’s preferred pass-times, nor did natural bent

of his intellect so incline. Yet Jimmy did try his best, for a while. Our teacher, Sorrel Paskin, was a thin, burning young man with heavy black glasses and a goatee, who openly wooed me as his favorite, (as later on, to his deserved disappointment, in Physics and Philosophy) granted a sour,grudging regard to Nicky, and set himself to hector and humiliate Jimmy to the very limit of his power. An autocratic master can evidently hold the class at his mercy; the converse is also true, if less easy to see. Maybe Mr. Paskin thought we students, or I, would somehow join in the disparagement, the disdain. In fact, many or most of the masters were sadistic bullies, and some of the students could usually be cowed or jollied into playing along, especially if the target was an unpopular boy. Nothing of the sort happened here; rather, the class as a whole, and I, in particular, felt empathic distress, which we were powerless to act upon, as Jimmy was belabored with chains of sarcastic questions that he evidently couldn't answer. I knew that physically, and even in some parts of his mind, Jimmy already was a man, but here in the classroom he had to submit, which was visibly hard for him, despite the ingrained deferential attitude of a trained Catholic boy. His voice strained but didn't break. He was a little too old to cry. But his hopeful attitude towards the school, and even his sense of himself, began to change from that time forward. And, in somewhat similar ways, perhaps, I think the same was true for all of us.

Willie | 9/18/2009, 11:54 am EST

“And in the next life, father, I’m gonna have the PADDLE”

Jimmy is already busy

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