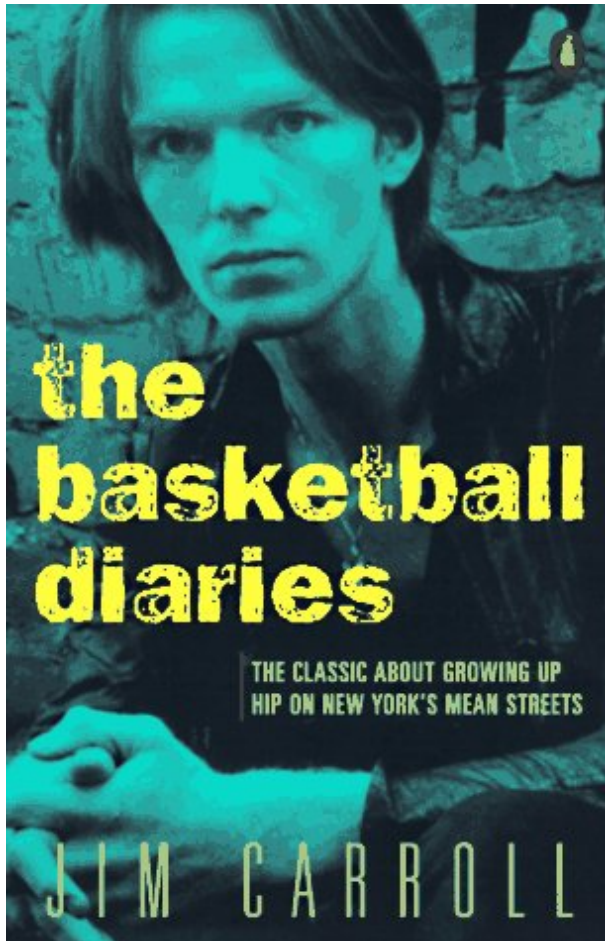


R.I.P: Jim Carroll

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I heard today that Jim Carroll passed away. Jim is one of those strange characters in my life with whom I had a very intense couple of days and then never saw or heard from again. And while I doubt he'd remember me, I do remember him; I found him a warm and generous person, someone who could tell great stories seemingly endlessly.

Jim wrote *The Basketball Diaries* and was a pivotal figure in the New York punk and poetry circles in the late '70s and early '80s. He was a contemporary of all the legends-- people like Lou Reed and Patti Smith, and knew all of them very well. His ex-wife, Rosemary Carroll, is also one of the most powerful music lawyers in the city and married to Danny Goldberg. Here is my remembrance of Jim.

This guy I knew, Ned Ascher, that lived in the Norfolk area was part of the poetry scene and also booked talent for some clubs in the area. He set up a show for Infectious Organisms, a band I was managing, and we became friends-- one of those entertainment kinds of friendships, which is to say very intense very quickly and flickering out just as rapidly to the point where I haven't heard from him or seen him in 10 years.

One day Ned called me and said there was a poetry festival being held in Norfolk, asking if I would drive Jim Carroll from Union Station in Washington, D.C. to Norfolk and then hang out with him the next weekend and drive him back. I didn't really know of Jim at that point but agreed as I was up for an adventure. Jim didn't like flying so he was going to take the train from New York and then I'd drive him the rest of the way.

I remember waiting in Union Station wondering whether he'd look anything like the picture on the books that I'd bought to get up to speed on his poetry. Pinpointing him turned out not to be a problem. He was a very tall, very strange looking guy and I believe he was wearing some kind of fuzzy scarf. Right away he seemed slightly different. I was able to immediately spot him and lead him back to my black Mazda Navajo, on loan from my parents.

It was later in the evening when we finally got out of D.C. and it took us a good number of hours to drive to Norfolk. The whole time he was regaling me with stories of his youth. Stories of reading poetry in bars and clubs and churches downtown. Stories of seeing the Velvet Underground at Max's and talking to Lou Reed. He told me about his time spent shooting heroin and how he'd written a poetry book called *The Book of Nods*, which was the first time I'd heard of the term "nodding off."



Most interestingly, he talked about his time as a rock star, which I hadn't known about at all. He spoke about his first record, *Catholic Boy*, and how the really great record was *Dry Dreams*, the follow-up. He described how Adam Duritz had come up to him once and told him how formative *Dry Dreams* was for him as an album. He explained the impact that "People Who Died" had when it came out. He talked and talked and I listened and, I have to say, we really enjoyed each other's company.

We finally arrived down in Norfolk and Jim did a couple of readings. I made a bit of an ass of myself in a few different seminars where I was confrontational with some of the speakers who were riffing on the equivalency of free association poetry and poetry jams versus written or constructed poetry. Meanwhile, I was the guy that was tracking him down for his appointments, hanging with him in his hotel room and so on.

Towards the end of the weekend, if I remember correctly, Jim got another ride back up to DC. But before he left, he signed the copy of *Living at the Movies* that I'd brought. I believe it says, "To Sam, thanks for a wonderful adventure in the Confederacy, Jim Carroll," which is a great inscription and near and dear to my heart.

I got back home and picked up a copy of *Catholic Boy* and was mildly blown away by how legitimately great it is as a record. Jim has a perfect punk singing voice and the guitar tones and the production are classic early '80s New Wave/punk. My favorite part of the record is the second song, "Three Sisters," for its vicious blasts of guitars and the way he sings "*She says RAZOR when she goes down on you.*" He's got this little New York lisp thing going when he sings and when he talks-- it's pitch perfect for the music and the way it all comes together.

"People Who Died" continues to be an incredible song particularly the line "*They're all my friends/ And they died.*" He shouts it and you hear the longing and the anger and the pathos in his voice. Unlike Adam Duritz, I never got as into *Dry Dreams* as *Catholic Boy* but they're both great records.

He had a songwriter's eye and penchant for the well-turned phrase and that's something that I admire and respect about him. I suppose that comes from being an accomplished poet. But the flare and the feel of the cover image, the record called *Catholic Boy*, the title (The Book of Nods) or *Living At The Movies*-- they're all brilliant, powerful, short, effective ideas. That's perhaps why his transition to music was successful, because pithiness is at the heart of great lyrics. Saying more with saying less.

For about six or seven months now, I'd been intending to call my next record *Living At The Movies*. Not per se in honor of Jim but as a reference to the time we spent together, to that book of poetry and then to other ideas that the phrase represents for me. For me, this idea of living apart from yourself, observing life without experiencing it, treating events dissociatively-- as fodder and material for songs rather than as the guts of your personal existence. And now Jim has passed away and I don't feel qualified to write a proper obituary. I hardly knew him. But I can offer these stories up to anyone that's interested and they can be added, even if in some distractingly tiny way, to the public canon and to the public memory of this poet and musician and artist.

I remember him as tall, with fine straight red hair, as having been through some very difficult trials, as being funny, as having an incredibly distinctive speaking voice, as turning me on to his music, as telling a great story, and, from what I knew of him, being a good and generous man.

RIP Jim Carroll.

by [Sam Jacobs](#), who is the lead singer and songwriter behind the New York-based The Flying Change.

