

CULTURE

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The last flight of the Phoenix



Jim Carroll, author of 'The Basketball Diaries,' lived the quintessential New York life

BY ALEX WILLIAMS
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, NEW YORK

It's not easy to come up with a second act when your first act was being Jim Carroll.

He was the author of *The Basketball Diaries*, a cult-classic memoir of his drug-fueled misadventures as a teenager in the 1960s; he then became a celebrated downtown poet; and then, the star of his own hit rock band.

Carroll had lived a panoramic New York youth that his fans had turned into legend.

But by the time he died of a heart attack this Sept. 11 at the age of 60, Carroll, who had once hung out with the Rolling Stones and Allen Ginsberg, no longer bore much resemblance to the downtown cover-boy with the chiseled cheekbones and flowing red hair, friends said.

His once-powerful athlete's body had been weakened by pneumonia and hepatitis C, said Rosemary Carroll, his former wife, who had remained a close friend. At times, circulation problems in his legs prevented him from leaving his apartment. His trademark hair was flecked with gray, and often tucked under a wool beanie. His cheekbones were hidden behind a white beard that plunged to the collar of his T-shirts.

Carroll had moved back to Inwood, in upper Manhattan, to the same building where he had grown up. "Jim would often sit home with these heavy curtains drawn shut," recalled Martin Heinz, a friend, one of the few to maintain contact with him in latter months.

But Carroll did have a purpose. He was trying to finish his first novel, tentatively titled *The Petting Zoo*, an ambitious book about an art-world prodigy of the 1980s, Billy Wolfram, who is driven by early fame into seclusion, where he suffers psychological and spiritual crises. It didn't take much to see the autobiographical thread. In his teens, Jim, a scholarship student at the elite Trinity School and fledgling heroin addict, was a high-school basketball star who shot jumpers on the same courts as Lew Alcindor. The journal he kept between the ages of 14 and 16 — dark comic accounts of ducking class to cop drugs, steal cars and hustle in Times Square — earned the praise of Jack Kerouac and later became *The Basketball Diaries*.

He became involved in the downtown poetry scene, receiving praise as a new Rimbaud. In his late 20s, he tried rock 'n' roll, nudged by his

old girlfriend Patti Smith. He was soon jamming with Keith Richards, and formed the Jim Carroll Band, whose first release, *Catholic Boy*, has been described as the last great punk album.

"Jim was really in love with the concept of his own phoenix-like rise, which had happened repeatedly in his life — bottoming out, then transcending his negative circumstances with an undeniably brilliant work of art," Rosemary Carroll said.

A "brilliant work of art" is what Carroll's ardent, loyal fans were hoping for in his novel, and what the writer himself must have passionately wished for. A successful novel might have meant that he would not be marginalized as an aging "punk poet," as he was in some recent obituaries. Given his health, it might have constituted his most unlikely comeback yet.

But Carroll, who had specialized in street-rap diary entries, poems and song lyrics, found adapting his literary voice to long-form prose challenging. "He definitely wrote a lot and tossed a lot," said Betsy Lerner, his agent.

And "he worked irregularly," she added. "Sometimes it was a struggle to pick up the thread again, but once he did, it would be amazing. He'd have these tremendous flights. He was still very much in the old Romantic school, I guess."

"I always used to tell him, 'It's the much anticipated'" Jim Carroll novel. Lerner added. "Then it was the 'long-awaited.' Then it was '10 years in the making.'"

By the time he died, the book was in its final edits, close enough to completion to publish posthumously, perhaps by the fall of 2010, said Paul Slovak, his editor and the publisher of Viking.

In his last years, Jim Carroll did venture out, infrequently, to Narcotics Anonymous meetings (he had been sober since the 1970s), and joining friends for a "breakfast club" at a Chelsea coffee shop.



At these gatherings, Carroll was not the scathing street punk described in recent obituaries, but rather a raconteur and yarn-spinner in the grand Irish tradition. His stories — about Greek philosophy, old movies, his youthful adventures on the streets — invariably spun off in epic digressions.

"It would often take three or four breakfasts to get the end of a story," recalled Heinz, 48, his friend and breakfast club regular.

There, Carroll sometimes discussed his ambivalence about his time in the spotlight. And in private, Carroll's thoughts on fame and his life could be searing:

"My self sabotaging tendencies in all aspects of my life, along with the validation needs you referenced, go without saying," Carroll wrote in a 2005 message to Heinz. "There are deep seeded reasons for both, but the latter is also an outcome of the way you are spoiled and coddled by managers, women and media et al when you are on top, and the quickness with which everyone scatters when you recede a moment."

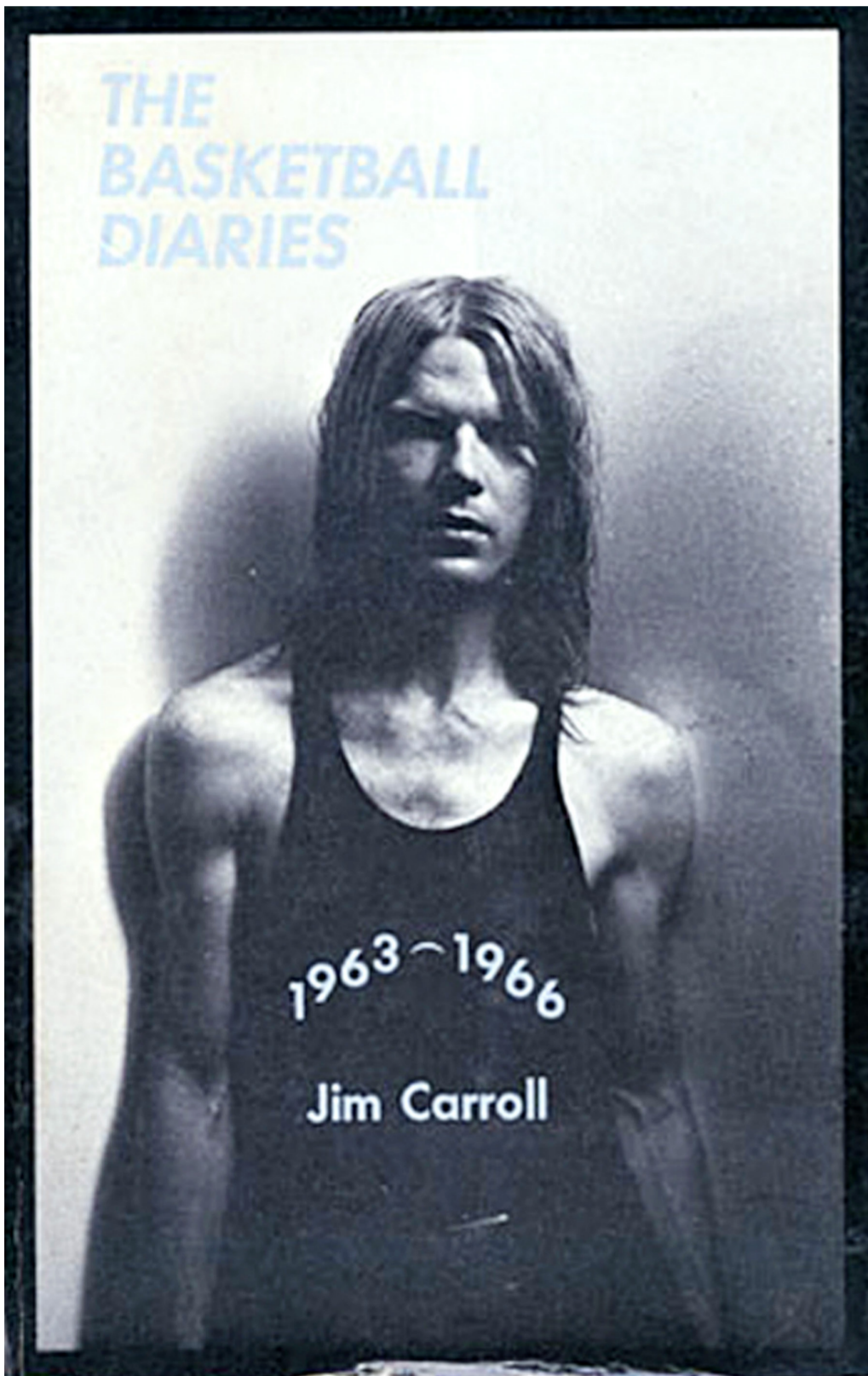
Last month, Carroll canceled multiple appointments to see Lerner, his agent, citing doctors' appointments. The last time she had seen him, a year before, she had listened to hours of rambling, if hilarious, digression. She finally persuaded him to sit at his computer and discuss the novel's third and final section. The other two were largely finished. The book was close. Near the end, however, Carroll receded again. He stopped returning Lerner's e-mail messages. He seemed to be "grappling with the last questions about life through this character."

Carroll was alone the day he died. A neighbor peering into his window apparently saw him slump to the floor and called 911, Tom Carroll said. ("Classic Inwood," joked Tara Newman, a friend who also grew up there).

In the final passage of *The Petting Zoo*, Billy Wolfram, accompanied by a mythic raven, succumbs. He is also alone, and too young to die. But his death is not without ecstasy:

"Finally, a last sigh of consciousness rocked him gently on the deck of an old schooner ship. Billy's body, dark blue like the storm clouds preceding the storm, shattered and his eyes closed dull and loosely. Sensing young Wolfram had given up the ghost, the raven glided back down aside the dead artist, whispering a last demand.

"It's time your eyes remain shut, Billy Wolfram. Now is the time, so get on with it. Take that single step and fly."



Above: The cover of *The Basketball Diaries* by Jim Carroll. The memoir of Carroll's drug-fueled misadventures as a teenager in the 1960s was made into a 1995 movie starring Leonardo DiCaprio. Top right: Jim Carroll at Balducci's in New York earlier this year. Bottom right: The *Catholic Boy* record cover by the Jim Carroll Band. The album has been described as the last great punk album.

PHOTOS: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

TOP FIVE MANDARIN ALBUMS

SEPT. 18 TO SEPT. 24



1 Super Junior-M and Super Girl with **16.88%** of sales

2 Alisa (高以愛) and Alisa with **8.21%**

3 Compilation album Faith Map with **7.61%**

4 Cosmos People (宇宙人) and Cosmos People (宇宙人) with **7.05%**

5 Shaun (永邦) and Devil's Tears (魔鬼的眼淚) with **6.92%**

ALBUM CHART COMPILED FROM G-MUSIC (WWW.G-MUSIC.COM.TW), BASED ON RETAIL SALES

PLANET POP

Actress **Bijou Phillips** says she knew her half-sister **Mackenzie Phillips** had consensual sex with their father, Mamas and the Papas leader **John Phillips**.

In a statement read by **Oprah Winfrey** on her talk show on Friday, Bijou Phillips says she was 13 years old when Mackenzie Phillips told her about the sexual relationship.

Bijou Phillips is now 29 and says the news was confusing and scary. She says it was "heartbreaking" to think her family would leave her alone with her father.

Appearing as a guest on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* on Friday, Mackenzie Phillips said their father "had changed his ways as much as he was able to" and she felt Bijou Phillips was safe.

Mackenzie Phillips says she did go get her sister when she "felt like she wasn't being watched properly."

Mackenzie Phillips said in a memoir published last week that she had an incestuous affair for years with her father. In the memoir *High Arrival*, which was published a year after she was arrested for cocaine possession, Phillips writes that she had sex with her father at age 19, the night before her 1979 marriage to Jeff Sessler, a member of the Rolling Stones' entourage.

The former star of TV sitcom *One Day at a Time* said she and her father used drugs that night. John Phillips died in 2001.

"My father was not a man with boundaries," Phillips writes. "He was full of love, and he was sick with drugs. I woke up that night to find myself having sex with my own father."

The town of Marfa, Texas, is back in the spotlight again, after actor **Randy Quaid** and his wife were released from a jail there late Thursday after being arrested for allegedly skipping out on a US\$10,000 California hotel bill.

The pair posted bail after the sheriff provided a ride to a bank. Quaid and his wife, **Evi**, each posted US\$20,000 after spending several hours in the jail in Marfa, Presidio County Sheriff Danny Dominguez said.

Dominguez said he drove the actor to a bank to obtain the bail money. Quaid remained in his custody during the trip but was not handcuffed. The sheriff said the actor received no special treatment.

"I like to help everybody out," Dominguez said. "It's a small town." A felony warrant for burglary, defrauding an innkeeper and conspiracy was issued out of Santa Barbara, California, for

Quaid and his wife after authorities received a complaint early this month that the couple had not paid a bill of more than US\$10,000 due to a local hotel.

The Quaid's were arrested on Thursday afternoon after a deputy spotted the couple driving in Marfa, where they had been staying at a hotel, Dominguez said.

Evi Quad "resisted a little bit, it wasn't too much," the sheriff said. "She calmed down quickly."

Quaid won a Golden Globe Award and was nominated for an Emmy for his portrayal of US President Lyndon Johnson in *LBJ: The Early Years*; but he's perhaps best known for his roles in the *National Lampoon's Vacation* movies, *Independence Day* and *Kingpin*.

He also played a hard-nosed sheep rancher in *Brokeback Mountain*, then sued Focus Features and the film's producers in 2006, claiming he was compelled to work cheaply when told the film — which earned US\$82 million at the domestic box office — had no prospects of making money.

A native Texan, he is the older brother of fellow actor **Dennis Quaid**. Marfa, a remote West Texas town, is no stranger to Hollywood attention. More than 50 years ago, filmmaker

George Stevens settled on the area for his epic Texas oil tale *Giant*, which starred **Rock Hudson**, **Elizabeth Taylor** and **James Dean**.

More recently, *There Will Be Blood* and *No Country for Old Men* were filmed in the town of 2,100, founded as a railroad stop in 1883.

In other news, Spain's **Alicia de Larrocha**, a child prodigy who went on to become one of the greatest classical pianists of her generation, has died at the age of 86.

A spokesman for the Quiron hospital in Barcelona, where she was admitted some days ago, said she died from cardiorespiratory failure shortly after 11pm on Friday.

Born in Barcelona in 1923, she gave her first recital at age 6 and made her orchestral debut aged 11. The last of some 4,000 concerts was in 2003, when she was 80.

De Larrocha was particularly renowned for her recordings of composers from her native Spain, such as **Enrique Granados** and **Isaac Albeniz**. She won two Grammys as well Spain's Prince of Asturias award for the arts in 1994.

Finally, the first posthumous release of a new song by **Michael Jackson**, *This Is It*, is scheduled for Oct. 12.



Bijou Phillips told Oprah she knew about her sister's incestuous relationship Mamas and the Papas singer John Phillips.

Sony Music Entertainment offered few details about the song, except to say it includes backing vocals by Jackson's brothers.

Two weeks later, Sony is releasing a two-disc set to coincide with the movie that shows scenes of Jackson rehearsing for his series of London concerts. Jackson died before publicly stepping back on stage.

The album includes some of Jackson's greatest hits as they appeared on previous albums. The second disc features previously unreleased versions of Jackson songs and a spoken-word poem from Jackson called *Planet Earth*.

—AGENCIES