

JIM

I remember first finding Jim Tate's books in the stacks of the SUNY Geneseo library in 1974.

I remember crashing on friends' couches night after night and carrying around a copy of *Absences*.

I remember "When I drink/I am the only man/in New York City."

I remember years later Jim at our house for dinner in Shutesbury. Alix was leaving late that night for Montreal by train, on a magazine assignment. We drank a lot of wine. After midnight, the three of us climbed into my car, putting Alix's bags in the trunk, and drove to the train stop in Amherst. The one-room station was locked and summer-quiet. We stood on the platform smoking, teasing Alix that she'd sleep through her stop. Then the train lumbered into the dark station, coming to a halt right in front of us, stopping for Alix, Alix alone, which made us giggle.

I remember Jim Tate was "one of the Young Turks" –according to my friend Gerry in the 1970s.

I remember Jim Tate's poems sounding like a voice that was already inside my head.

I remember around the very beginning of my first workshop with Jim, I asked him to sign a chapbook of his I'd just bought in the lobby of Bartlett Hall at UMass. He inscribed it, "Prematurely."

I remember hitchhiking from Rochester NY to Boston in 1976 with a girlfriend, and visiting the Grolier bookshop for the first time. I bought a copy of *Viper Jazz*, which had just come out—the blue tinted photo on the cover: a dragonfly perched on a metal toy car.

I remember “ – and in the distance, the distance.”

I remember painting Dara’s house during her first summer in Amherst. She hired me based on Jim’s recommendation—his recommendation based, I think, on a poem of mine that said something about house painting.

I remember smoking cigarettes in Jim’s workshop, smokers on the window side of the room, Jim among them, with the windows open.

I remember buying a paperback copy of *The Oblivion Ha-Ha* from a table on a sidewalk on a very warm sunny day.

I remember how skinny Jim was. But he wore cool clothes and they hung off him in just the right way, off-hand and elegant.

I remember hearing Jim read “Pride’s Crossing” in the library at Smith College, his Kansas City confidential tone of voice.

I remember “Then we’ll get us some wine and spare ribs.”

I remember “I was alone when it hit me.”

I remember Jim in workshop. If he liked something, really liked it, he had absolute conviction. Sometimes he’d say “Wow” or “Jesus.”

I remember Jim snickering as he'd say something to a student seated nearest him in class, and nobody else would know what it was about.

I remember Jim telling jokes.

I remember Jim Tate began every workshop reading a poem, a poem from a young poet's new book, or a poet in translation we'd never heard of.

I remember Jim correcting me sharply when I once said something about a poet who I actually knew very little about.

I remember making a martini when Jim came over. And making one for Dara too.

I remember Jim and Dara excited about a fortune-teller's statue they found for us—a young woman's head wrapped in spangly cloth, cold pale complexion, a little blush on the cheeks, beads around her neck. She had a spooky vacant look. They called her Eva.

I remember smoking a joint with Jim and Dara in our new apartment in Northampton—Northampton being across the river from where we used to live, which seemed very far away.

I remember Jim asking students in oral exams, "What do you think of Robert Lowell?"

I remember driving the back roads to Jim's house in Pelham from our house in Shutesbury—only about 4 miles.

I remember sitting in the screened porch of his house in summer and having an afternoon cocktail.

I remember later how I forgot about sitting on his front porch, and Dara reminding me.

I remember Jim calling often in the afternoon, after having finished a poem for the day, and he'd talk and talk, and be very happy.

I remember sitting with Jim in his living room and pulling books down from his bookshelves or from the stacks piled on the coffee table and reading poems from them out loud and saying why it was that we liked so-and-so and what so-and-so's best book was.

I remember Jim buying rare poetry books, and showing me a lovely copy of *Harmonium*.

I remember the long ramshackle shed that stood at the top of the driveway at Jim's house, and how slowly, over time, it was collapsing, but with a compelling sense of composure, or discomposure.

I remember opening the door into Jim's kitchen and calling out, "Hi Jim!" And he'd call back, "Hi Jim!"

I remember sending Jim a telegram when he won the Pulitzer for his Selected Poems, even though we lived only four miles away.

I remember the telegram was a haiku.

I remember sometimes being out with Jim and how strange it was at times to be standing next to him when someone approached him and to just disappear as that person gave Jim complete attention.

I remember the Bendos Jim gave to Jack and Nik.

I remember Jim lending me some of his old jazz records for comp tapes.

I remember harboring a connection between Jim, from Kansas City, and the Kansas City jazz greats of the 30s: Lester Young, Count Basie, Jimmy Rushing, Walter Page.

I remember Jim's dit.

I remember Harlan Leonard and his Rockets, "the Kansas City Sound," among Jim's records.

I remember Jim enthralled with the Little Jimmy Scott performance he and Dara saw at the Iron Horse – Jim turning out his hands and spinning half a turn.

I remember Jim saying in response to someone, irritably, "I like Frank" – meaning Frank Sinatra.

I remember the first night in our house on Washington Avenue, an April night, walking with Jim and Dara and Alix to hear Bob Dylan at Smith, at John M. Green Hall – weird just to walk over and see Dylan.

I remember Jim made comp tapes.

I remember Jim taping me a copy of Daniel Johnston's *Hi, How Are You?*

I remember "I'm walking the cow."

I remember "no more pushing Joe around."

I remember the Scud Mountain Boys.

I remember Jim was punctual.

I remember Jim Tate was a slow-walker. Even when he was in good health, Jim was the slowest walker I've ever known.

I remember walking with Jim on the sidewalks of Amherst, and having to stop myself so I wouldn't walk too far ahead.

I remember walking with Jim on the sidewalks of Amherst, and he'd come to a complete stop to finish telling a story.

I remember one afternoon every January, Dara, Jim, and I would meet to read through poetry manuscripts for the Juniper prize.

I remember at Jim's for one of our Juniper meetings bringing my slippers, which I think offended him.

I remember Jim visiting in Shutesbury. *Distance from Loved Ones* had just come out. The next day we found he'd inscribed our copy: "I love to sit outside your house and watch you."

I remember Jim liked barbecue. And hamburgers.

I remember *Doughboys, Playboys, and Cowboys*.

I remember getting barbecue with Dara and Jim and Alix and Emily and Guy at a local short-lived barbecue joint in Northampton. Jim ordered baby back ribs. After we started eating, Dara asked Jim what he thought of the ribs. "Pretty good," he said.

I remember Jim loved a song I'd included on a comp tape: "I'm My Own Dog," by George Bedard.

I remember Jim and I sharing our affection for Bunky and Jake, and Jake's later band, Jake & the Family Jewels.

I remember *Flaming Red*.

I remember Jim loaning me VHS tapes of some Richard Kern movies.

I remember *Fingered*, with Lydia Lunch.

I remember one of Jim Tate's blurbs appearing on the back of a poetry book by someone named Mercy Bona. It was from the 70s. "Mercy Bona," Jim wrote, "is 'chrome socks' in my book."

I remember running into Jim often on Tuesday afternoons at For The Record, and browsing new music releases together.

I remember Jim Tate's workshops met at 1 PM on Tuesdays, in Bartlett Hall, Room 256.

I remember how foolish Jim could make you feel with just a look.

I remember sitting in Jim Tate's living room with him and Dara shooting looks between them, and then Jim leaving the room and returning with a new manuscript of poems, reading, among others, "50 Views of Tokyo" and "How the Pope Is Chosen."

I remember Jim reading "Burnt Green Earth" at the Jones Library in Amherst, saying it was based on Jack, and our new life as exhausted parents.

I remember Jim saying that envy is a wasted emotion.

I remember envying that Jim belonged to a "gang" while in high school.

I remember Jim's gang was called the Zoo Club.

I remember seeing these shows with Jim and Dara and Alix: Jimmie Dale Gilmore, Sonny Rollins, Bob Dylan (3x), John Hiatt (3x), Lucinda Williams (2x), Jane Siberry, Nusret Fateh Ali Kahn, Vic Chesnutt, Emmy Lou Harris, Randy Newman, Kasey Chambers, Herbie Hancock...

I remember Jim on a bill with musicians and other performers, an outdoor summer venue at Look Park in Florence. While he read, little kids raced around on the grass in front of the stage.

I remember Jim and Dara reading before a big crowd at the Northampton Center for the Arts: Jim, from *Memoir of the Hawk*; Dara, from *Voyages in English*.

I remember saying to Dara that Jim's making his own little town.

I remember Jim showing up once or twice a week at the Goliard bookshop, just to get a look at new titles, and socialize a bit.

I remember Jim visiting Wootton's bookshop the same way, usually with Dara.

I remember Jim wrote a lovely sad poem about a bookshop after Wootton's closed.

I remember Dara and Jim, with Emily and Guy, taking pictures at our new house, Washington Avenue, February 1997.

I remember Jim used Ilford black & white film, which could be developed with a sepia look.

I remember living under the flight path of C5-As that flew out of Westover, how low they cruised roaring right on top of us. Jim would run out of his house with a camera to shoot pictures of them.

I remember a tape Jim made while on a car trip he took up to Maine. It was called *Jim's Big Trip Up North*. He included a picture of a moose in the cassette case.

I remember Dara and Jim bringing us back a coffee mug from the Martin & Osa Johnson Safari Museum in Chanute, Kansas, because of Elizabeth Bishop's poem "In the Waiting Room."

I remember as a thank you for teaching one of his workshops, Jim gave me a copy of James Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*.

I remember meeting Jim Tate in 1984, at an MFA party at Jay Neugeboren's house in Hadley. I walked over to where Jim was standing with a few other people, thinking "don't say I'm a big fan," and then saying "I'm a big fan."

I remember giving Jim an old group photo of nurses from WWI, in a nice battered old frame, for his 50th birthday.

I remember Jim's comp tapes of Fela Kuti, and Dudu Pakwana, and Sheila Chandra, and Ali Akbar Khan, and Nusret Fateh Ali Khan, and Jimmie Dale Gilmore.

I remember seeing Nusret Fateh Ali Khan with Jim and Dara and Alix, and, a few rows ahead of us, Shahid whirling around and waving when he saw us.

I remember Jim describing a Ron Sexsmith show with complete affection, Sexsmith rumped like a guy who'd just woke up.

I remember one day trying to fix Jim's stereo, with no luck.

I remember one of Jim's last visits to our house. We were sitting around the dinner table. Jim had been pretty quiet. He nudged Dara and tapped his watch with his finger.

I remember flakes of paint hanging off the ceiling of Jim's living room.

I remember my girlfriend in Boston attending a Jim Tate reading in Cambridge, in 1979. Afterwards, at a signing at the Grolier, she had him sign for me his new book, *Riven Doggeries*.

I remember wondering, what are riven doggeries?

I remember Jim gossiping during our long afternoon phone calls. It was fun, and mostly one-sided. He was the one who knew people to gossip about.

I remember Jim saying he never tried to write anything funny.

I remember while reading Juniper submissions, Jim getting impatient with the solemnity of what we were looking at.

I remember Dara and Jim coming down to New York to attend a reading I was doing at the Center for Book Arts, in Soho. Later that night, my toolbox was stolen from the trunk of my car.

I remember Jim went to an acupuncturist for years. I asked him if it did anything. He said, no, but he liked going. The acupuncturist was a nice guy.

I remember Jim and Dara taking us for walks around the quarry near Dara's house.

I remember Jim's gentle flat Midwestern delivery of his poems.

I remember the chair Jim always sat in, in his living room.

I remember Jim's revulsion at rice cakes.

I remember Jim showing up in workshop with new reading glasses. My poem that day just happened to be in a magnified font-size, a result of my playing around with the Xerox machine. He thought I was trying to be funny.

I remember, after my first book was taken, Jim said, okay, you've done that, now put it away, and work on something new.

I remember Jim wrote poems every day, and how charged he'd sound on the phone when he thought he'd gotten a good one that day.

I remember Jim's IBM Selectric.

I remember there were lists of names he kept in his office—names he'd used in poems, or names he could use. Dara knows which.

I remember how much energy Dara and Jim got from each other while they worked in adjacent rooms upstairs in Jim's house, and how infectious that energy was.

I remember Jim liked Bob Newhart's TV show, the one where Newhart plays an innkeeper in Vermont.

I remember "This is my brother Daryl, and this is my other brother Daryl."

I remember walking to Emily Dickinson's grave with Jim and Dara.

I remember from one of their driving trips around the Midwest, Dara and Jim sending us haiku on postcards.

I remember Jim's pure affection for our greyhound, Henry. "It's like having a llama in the house," he said

I remember watching the first strike of Desert Storm unfold on television at Jim's house one night, a night that he was heart-broken over the end of an affair.

I remember Jim's list of "100 Works of Fiction."

I remember seeing Sonny Rollins at the Calvin with Jim and Dara and Alix, and sitting in the middle of the front row, and Rollins striding out mid-solo, the cavernous bell of his tenor.

I remember Jim and Dara and Alix and me watching Dylan perform "Friend of the Devil," a tribute to Jerry Garcia.

I remember boomerangs Jim and Dara brought back from a visit to the SAC base in Nebraska.

I remember an afternoon at Jim's house when he and I realized we'd never thrown a boomerang. We took one of the SAC boomerangs out to the backyard. With the first toss, to our surprise, it came back. So we took turns throwing it harder and further, going for big loops, and having it swing right back to where we stood. Then finally with one toss the boomerang went too far and vanished into the trees.

I remember the two of us standing there a minute looking up for the boomerang, just standing and looking.

I remember then afterwards heading, a little sheepishly, back into the house for a drink.