

The Basketball Diaries Study Guide

The Basketball Diaries by Jim Carroll

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Introduction

The publication of Jim Carroll's diary, entitled *The Basketball Diaries: Age Twelve to Fifteen* (1978), had been eagerly awaited. The book, which is generally referred to by its main title alone, had started appearing in excerpt form throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s in various literary publications. Carroll claimed that the diaries were written at the time in which the events related took place. However, some critics wondered how much the diaries were edited before publication, especially since the book includes many outrageous incidents. Regardless of its authenticity, the book made a statement when it was published. Some people at that time were glorifying the image of life in the 1960s urban counterculture. Carroll's gritty diary was explicit; it took readers inside the real world of drug addiction, male prostitution, and crime in 1960s New York.

The book also discussed what life was like for war babies—people who grew up under the constant fear of nuclear annihilation during the Cold War—and the difficulty in remaining neutral in the 1960s antiwar debate. *The Basketball Diaries* has become Carroll's best-known work, especially after the release of a 1995 film adaptation starring Leonardo DiCaprio. In 1987, Carroll published a sequel, *Forced Entries: The Downtown Diaries, 1971-73*.



Author Biography

Jim Carroll was born in New York City on August 1, 1951. When he was growing up on the tough streets of Manhattan, Carroll pursued careers as a basketball player and writer. While Carroll's massive drug use as a teenager extinguished any hope of his becoming a basketball star, his poetry about these drug experiences put him on the road to literary stardom. After the publication of his first two poetry collections, *Organic Trains* (1967) and *Four Ups and One Down* (1970), Carroll's poetry was relatively unknown outside underground circles. That changed with the publication of his third poetry collection, *Living at the Movies* (1973). By this time, Carroll was also making a name for himself with his autobiographical prose writing, which had begun appearing in various literary magazines in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In 1978, these disjointed prose writings were collected in one limited-edition volume, entitled *The Basketball Diaries*, which was reprinted in larger numbers in 1980. The book established Carroll's literary career and gave him name recognition that he translated to success in other areas. The most notable of these was Carroll's music career. Patti Smith, one of Carroll's former girlfriends, encouraged him to make the transition from poet to rock musician, as she had done. In 1980, the same year that *The Basketball Diaries* went into wide distribution, the Jim Carroll Band released its first album, *Catholic Boy*, which featured the hit single, "People Who Died." The song, which lists Carroll's many friends who died from murder, suicide, drug overdose, and other unnatural causes, is generally acknowledged as the high point of Carroll's musical career. In 1995, "People Who Died" - along with several other songs by Carroll or his band - was included on the soundtrack of the film adaptation of *The Basketball Diaries*.

During the 1980s, Carroll released another poetry collection, *The Book of Nods* (1986), and his second collection of diaries, *Forced Entries: The Downtown Diaries* (1987). Neither of these books was as successful as *The Basketball Diaries*, which continued to be Carroll's best-known work. In 1992, Carroll released a spoken-word musical recording entitled *Praying Mantis*, and in 1999 he published a nonfiction book entitled *Permissive Bargaining and Congressional Intent: A Special Report*.

Besides these two works, most of Carroll's publications after the 1980s were poetry collections. These include *Fear of Dreaming: The Selected Poems of Jim Carroll* (1993) and *Void of Course: Poems 1994-1997* (1998). Carroll lives and works in New York City, where, as of 2002, he is working on his first novel.



Plot Summary

Fall 1963

In the first entry of *The Basketball Diaries*, a thirteen-year-old Carroll uses a fake birth certificate from his coach, Lefty, to get into a twelve-and-under basketball league. Carroll and his friends sniff cleaning fluid to get high, steal purses, and steal from another basketball team. On Halloween, they attack the neighborhood girls with flour-filled socks, then get drunk and use rock-filled socks to break windows. Lefty catches some of his players sniffing glue, but Carroll dumps his before getting caught. Carroll and his family move into their new apartment on the tip of Manhattan. Carroll and the gang get drunk, but one of them drinks too much and has to get his stomach pumped.

Winter 1964

Carroll, a non-Catholic, is forced to go to confession at his new Catholic school. He attends a funeral for one of his friends who dies in a glue sniffing accident. Carroll scores high on a test but is punished for lack of effort. He describes his first experience with heroin, which he believes is nonaddictive. He steals clothes from a department store and smokes marijuana with one of the older guys in his new neighborhood. A priest in Carroll's school spanks a student's naked buttocks behind closed doors and is sent away after the student's brother labels the priest a homosexual. Carroll's mother finds and destroys a bag of Carroll's marijuana.

Spring & Summer 1964

Carroll talks about the caves near his new apartment building, where he goes to smoke marijuana. He describes the rush he gets late at night while masturbating naked on the roof of his building. Carroll and his friends have a huge party in the woods, jump off a cliff into the Harlem River, and steal basketballs from the park house. Carroll loses his job as a seller at Yankee Stadium as a result of his drug use. Carroll and his friends steal liquor from their school that is intended for an American Legion party. He describes a sexual encounter with a girl at his friend's house.

Fall 1964

Carroll has trouble adjusting to the strict etiquette at the new private school that he is attending on a basketball scholarship, but he impresses his classmates with his confidence and athletic ability. During a routine trip with his gym class to Central Park, Carroll almost gets caught smoking marijuana. He notes the futility of the school's symbolic Thanksgiving fast for hunger. He describes a sexual encounter with a communist girl.



Winter 1965

Carroll accidentally exposes himself during a basketball game. He starts hanging around Headquarters, an apartment that hosts all of the local drug users. He drinks codeine cough syrup to get high. He describes his recurring fantasy about shooting a machine gun in class. He goes to a Communist Party meeting but is not impressed. He steals money from the wrestling team. Carroll and some of his team members take drugs that severely affect their game performance.

Spring 1965

Carroll gets picked up by a person who turns out to be a male transvestite. He talks about a kleptomaniac friend, Bobby Blake, who gets high and breaks into a closed ice cream parlor. Carroll's mother receives a notice from his principal about Carroll's bad grades and behavior problem. Blake gets high again, and this time he breaks into a clothes store and starts handing out free clothes to passersby, including the police who take him away. Carroll and a friend skip class to shoot up heroin in a basement, and they nearly get caught by the police. A little girl talks with Carroll about his antiwar views.

Summer 1965

Carroll describes how he hustles homosexuals for money, and he says that his hustles have gotten weird lately. He and several friends find a half-dead, naked woman who has tried to commit suicide by jumping out of a window. Carroll describes the bathroom at Grand Central Terminal, where men from all walks of life go to look at other men and masturbate. He recalls the first time he saw transvestites naked, when he was about nine years old. He talks about his fear of atomic war. Carroll and his friends get high and steal food from a restaurant. He gets high on a train and becomes paranoid that the other passengers are going to throw him off. He gets a case of gonorrhea, a sexually transmitted disease, and goes to an underground doctor in Harlem to get a shot and some pills. He realizes that he is not in control of his growing heroin addiction, but he says that he better get in control if he wants to do well in school and basketball.

Fall 1965

Carroll describes what it is like growing up as a war baby, living in constant fear of nuclear war. He says that getting high at Headquarters is the only way he can avoid getting involved in war politics. He notes that narcotics police steal most of dealers' drugs for themselves. He takes some LSD, a hallucinogenic drug also known as acid. The police raid Headquarters after a noise complaint. Carroll takes more acid and watches a moon eclipse. He describes his experiences during a massive electrical blackout. Carroll gets high and has sex with his latest rich girlfriend. He says heroin is so addictive that addicts will risk using a filthy needle in order to shoot up. Carroll talks



about his parents, saying that they try to draw him into arguments and political debates. He gets frustrated with the ineffectiveness of peace marches.

Winter 1966

Carroll has another classroom-shooting fantasy. He says his fear of atomic warfare has lessened but that he is still paranoid. He talks about his experiences during the National High School All Star Basketball Game, when he is groped by Benny Greenbaum, a homosexual college scout. Carroll explains his passion for writing about New York. Carroll describes what it is like shooting up and says that it is getting hard to concentrate on his writing. Carroll's drug habit continues to affect his basketball performance. He talks about an older woman with whom he has been having an affair; the rich divorcee pays for his drug habit and in return she makes him engage in abnormal sexual acts. Carroll talks about a junkie friend who is in prison for two years. Carroll and a friend get swindled by a drug dealer. Carroll buys heroin from a new dealer and begins to like the vomiting that comes as a side effect. He finds out that one of his old friends is in prison for a drug-related murder. Carroll gets sent to Riker's Island Juvenile Reformatory for three months for heroin possession.

Spring & Summer 1966

Carroll's headmaster intervenes and Carroll gets out of Riker's after one month. A friend offers him a shot of heroin, and Carroll is unable to refuse. Carroll has a bad acid trip and decides to stick to heroin. Since most heroin dealers have been arrested, he buys some methadone instead; while he is waiting for it to take effect, he notes that he is not in control of his addiction. Carroll hustles a homosexual. He defines the three types of junkies. Carroll and a group of friends steal a Porsche, but it gets towed before they can return with a buyer. Carroll and a friend steal raffle books from the American Legion then sell them door to door. In the process, they run across an older woman who has sex with them. They use their earnings to buy a spoon of cocaine. Carroll and a friend eat peyote, another hallucinogenic drug.

Carroll tries to give up heroin abruptly and describes his withdrawal symptoms in detail. Carroll steals some heroin from a friend and starts shooting up again. He goes to a drug-therapy session but soon returns to using heroin. Carroll talks to a junkie friend who has also been trying - and failing - to quit. Carroll and a friend go to New York's Chinatown to get heroin. In the last diary entry of the book, Carroll surfaces from a four-day high, realizing that he wants to be pure.



Part 1

Part 1 Summary

The Basketball Diaries is made up of a series of entries in the diary of Jim Carroll, a thirteen year-old boy living in the lower east side of Manhattan. The diary begins in the fall of 1963 and describes the activities that take place in Jim's life.

In the first entry, we learn that Jim is about to play in his first organized basketball league game. The league he is in, the Bidy League, is for players 12 years old and younger, but Jim is able to play on the team because his coach, a man named Lefty, got him a fake birth certificate.

Jim thinks Lefty might be a homosexual because of some of the things the coach has done, including touching Jim inappropriately. Nonetheless, Jim likes Lefty so he chooses to keep his suspicions to himself. Jim describes his coach as a "great guy" who regularly drives his players to games and buys them food.

Jim's team loses their first game. Afterward, as the team is waiting for the subway, two of the boys begin to fight. Jim says that while he doesn't like to fight, he loves to watch others fight. One of the boys tries to involve Jim in the fight, but he refuses. Jim says that he is not about to help a boy who is always getting him into trouble at school.

One unseasonably warm October day, Jim and two of his friends decide to skip basketball practice so that they can take a ferry ride to Staten Island. After stopping for sandwiches, the boys hitch a ride to the ferry on the rear fender of a bus. Once onboard the ferry, Jim's friend Tony takes out a bottle of cleaning fluid and suggests they all sniff it to get high. After a few sniffs, the three boys become nauseous and throw up over the side rail. Unfortunately their vomit lands on the head of a man sitting beneath the rail. Because they are afraid that the man will hurt them, the boys hide in the restroom until the ferry docks. They spend the rest of the afternoon playing basketball in a park and return home near nightfall.

A few days later, Jim comes home from school to find that one of his neighbors; an old woman he refers to as "old Mrs. McNulty," is being taken away in an ambulance. Jim says it was just a matter of time before that happened as nearly every night, Jim saw her pretending to offer Catholic Mass in her kitchen, wearing nothing but her bra and underpants. What Jim finds particularly strange about this ritual is not so much that the woman was pretending to offer Mass, but that she used a litany of obscenities throughout the ritual. Despite the fact that Jim isn't particularly religious, the sight of the old woman behaving in this manner bothers and disgusts him so much that he can not watch.

Jim and his friends often travel uptown where they work in teams to snatch pocketbooks from ladies walking down the street. The easiest technique that they use to steal is the



one by which one guy asks for directions and, while the woman points out the correct way, the other guy moves in to snatch her purse from her outstretched arm. Jim and his friends are known as the "Diaper Bandits" and they have gotten quite good at knowing which woman are the most lucrative targets. In this chapter, he describes his latest "hit," a theft that netted him \$123 plus some traveler's checks, which he sold to his friend's older brother. In Jim's mind, the biggest prize that he gains is the stack of Polaroid pictures featuring nude women engaged in various sex acts. Jim and Carson, his partner in crime, sell the pictures for three dollars each.

Jim's team travels to the Bronx one afternoon for a basketball game. Although his team has only five players available, and they finish the game with only four after Carson fouls out, they win by more than 40 points. After fouling out, Carson sneaks into the other team's locker room and steals all of their valuables. The team leaves the gym right after the game and they talk Lefty into stopping for hamburgers. Lefty tells the boys that they can only have one hamburger each; however, each boy orders several hamburgers. The bill comes to over nine dollars. Lefty only has five dollars on him so he has to leave his watch with the restaurant's manager until he returns with the rest of the money. Lefty has the last laugh. Before the boys can get into the car, Lefty drives off, leaving them stranded in the Bronx. As they are stranded in the parking lot, the boys from the other team, who are angry that they have been robbed, approach the team, armed with pipes. Luckily, Jim and his friends quickly hail a cab and manage to escape harm.

As the team makes their way to another game, one of the boys, Herbie, points that there are a number of prostitutes on the street. Herbie says that Pedro's mother, Pedro is a boy on the team, is one of them. The other boys think that Herbie is joking but they quickly realize that Pedro's mother is, in fact, on the corner. Embarrassed, Pedro runs from his teammates and doesn't show up for the game. When they pass his house after the game, Pedro runs inside before anyone can talk to him. Tony tells them that Pedro's parents both use Heroin and he suspects that Pedro's mother is prostituting herself to make money to buy more drugs. Jim feels sorry for Pedro and acknowledges that it must be difficult living in a home like that. After school the next day, Pedro's older brother finds Herbie and beats him up. The following day, Herbie's older brother gets revenge by beating up Pedro's brother.

Jim's family is planning to move to the tip of Manhattan in the near future, so Jim decides to take a trip there to visit his cousin. Jim really doesn't like his cousin but he thinks that he better get to know him and his friends since he will be attending school with them. After breakfast, Jim walks to the subway and once onboard, settles in for the long ride. He brings a magazine to help pass the time on the subway and, before long, Jim is absorbed by one of the stories. A drunken man sits down next to Jim and starts talking to him. At first Jim is annoyed because the train is only half full and he doesn't want to share his seat but Jim quickly becomes engaged in a conversation with the man. The two continue to talk until a transit officer enters the car and kicks the man off the train. As the subway pulls away from the station, Jim feels sad seeing the old man standing alone on the subway platform.



The night before Halloween, Jim and his friends use black shoe-polish to disguise themselves and spend the night scaring girls going to a church dance, young children, and old people. They fill socks with flour and use them to beat the girls going to the church dance until they get tired of it. The boys then replace the flour with gravel and use the socks to attack the "creeps" in a nearby housing project. For an added dose of fun, they fill a bag with dog feces and light it on fire outside the door of an old man's apartment. In Jim's estimation, no one is immune from their pranks, especially after they got drunk on some red wine Herbie's brother got for them. Jim finally arrives home at three in the morning and throws up on the new rug, an act he is sure will result in a beating from his father.

When Jim's team travels to Riverdale in the Bronx, they are exposed to a lifestyle that they seldom see. Rather than the apartments and tenements they are accustomed to, the homes in this neighborhood are single family residences with swimming pools. The school is, in Jim's words, "fancy" and the stands are filled with people who look at Jim and his teammates with pity. Lefty instructs the boys to press against the other team from the start and they are soon ahead by 23 points. As the score continues to mount, Lefty instructs them to lay off so that no one becomes suspicious enough to check the players' birth certificates. By halftime, the score is 53-20. At halftime, Lefty finds three players sniffing glue in the toilet stalls but Jim manages to flush his away before being caught. The glue sniffers are benched for the remainder of the game and Jim finishes the game with 42 points. After the game, the boys head back to their neighborhood where they spend the rest of the evening getting drunk and high.

Jim's family moves to the upper tip of Manhattan and he finds himself back in Catholic school. Jim detests the discipline of the school and he threatens to hit the first person who tries to use corporal punishment on him. Jim has secured a scholarship for a private high school and he is doing just enough to get by during his last year of grammar school. Although most of the kids in the neighborhood are described by Jim as, "strictly All-American," his cousin Kevin introduced him to some "weed-heads" that Kevin occasionally meets to play basketball. While Kevin doesn't smoke pot, he does do his share of drinking. Whenever his parents leave town for the weekend, Kevin, Jim, and some of their friends gather in Kevin's apartment to drink. During one such weekend, one of their friends, a guy named Willie, got so drunk that some of the others had to hold him upright while he went to the bathroom. When he finished, he fell and hit his head on the bathtub.

The boys think that cold air will sober Willie up so they take him outside for a walk. As they are walking, they pass a pretty girl on the sidewalk. Willie tries to reach for the girl, but she hits him in the groin. The pain causes Willie to pass out and, while Jim and his friends are trying to revive him, they are seen by a policeman. The officer asks the boys if they have been sniffing glue, a charge they deny vehemently. In an effort to convince the officer that they are not up to no good, Chris tells the officer that Willie was sleigh-riding when he lost control and ran into a light post. Jim is mortified because there is obviously no sled (or hill) in sight and there is only a thin coating of snow on the ground. The police officer sees through this story and tells the boys that they better tell the truth because Willie may be seriously injured. Finally, Jim confesses that they have been



drinking. The officer tries briefly to revise Willie, and having no luck, he calls for an ambulance. After Willie is taken to the hospital, the rest of the boys return to Kevin's apartment to watch television.

Part 1 Analysis

One of the first things we realize about young Jim Carroll is that he is a street-wise young man. At the young age of thirteen, he is a thief, a heavy drinker, and occasionally a pot smoker but he's a pretty good basketball player.

Despite Jim's basketball skill, we realize fairly early in the story that he is spiraling out of control. Crimes ranging from petty thefts to near-muggings are commonplace in Jim's life. Jim and his friends commit these crimes at an alarmingly frequent rate. He regularly gets drunk and he sniffs glue and cleaning fluid to get high. At this point, basketball does not dominate Jim's life, as soon as the game is over, he moves on to other things.

Jim is only able to play basketball on the neighborhood Bidy League team because his coach altered his birth certificate. His couch has apparently done this for other boys on the team as well. Whenever the team begins to beat another team too easily, Lefty tells the team to ease up so that the other coach does not become suspicious. While many may question Lefty's motives for doing this, after all, he is supposed to be a positive role model for these boys, in his own way Lefty was trying to protect the boys. By providing a team on which they can play, he is, at least for a portion of each week, keeping them off the streets and engaging them in a safe activity. Lefty also has specific rules for his team. He has prohibited the using of the word "motherfucker," stealing from other teams, and doing dangerous thing like sniffing glue.

Despite these apparent virtues, Lefty is a questionable character. In addition to using illegal players, he touches the boys inappropriately, and he doesn't object when they steal from the black players on other teams. While the boys are uncomfortable with the way Lefty touches them, none of them are willing to go to the authorities or to their parents so Lefty's behavior continues. Jim more or less shrugs the touching off as an unavoidable consequence of playing in the Bidy League. Jim's nonchalant attitude toward Lefty's sexual advances provide an early indication that he is certainly not homophobic and foreshadow his later ventures into the world of homosexual sex.

Perhaps part of their loyalty to Lefty stems from the fact that, while Lefty is certainly well aware of some, if not all, of the activities the boys are engaged in away from basketball, he does nothing to discourage them. Jim and his friends look at Lefty as a peer rather than as a person of authority and so, rather than respect their coach, they bully him into giving them rides and buying them food.

Jim's actions and activities can certainly be described as thug like. He and his friends make a frequent practice of terrorizing children, women, and old people. Yet, he seems to have a tender side as well. When the drunken old man enters the subway and sits next to Jim, Jim enters into a conversation with him. Furthermore, when the old man is



thrown off the train by a transit officer, Jim says he feels "blank and sad" seeing him being left behind on the platform. He also has enormous sympathy for his friend Pedro, a young boy whose parents' addiction to Heroin causes his mother to prostitute herself.

Jim appears to be a young man who does not have a great deal of respect for adults, nor does he appear to have a great deal of adult supervision. His disdain for adults in general, and the priests and nuns who teach in the Catholic schools he attends, in particular, is quite evident. Although he is only thirteen years old, he is regularly out on the streets until the early hours of the morning. Indeed, the only adult that he regularly mentions in his diary is Lefty, and we already know that Jim has little respect for his coach. While he does mention that his family moves during this period from the lower east side of Manhattan to its upper tip, we are not sure why this move occurs. We do learn that the neighborhood is nicer and we can assume that there is far less street crime and other forms of trouble. Perhaps, Jim's parents made this move to keep him out of trouble. If so, at least on some level, their plan is working. During his first weeks in the new neighborhood, while Jim does spend time drinking with his cousin Kevin, he does not mention being involved in any street crime. Because that Jim totally lacks adult supervision in his life and regularly uses alcohol and pot, it is not difficult to imagine that things will eventually fall apart on him.

Part 2

Part 2 Summary

The entries in this portion of Jim's diary take place during the winter of 1964.

Once a month, all of the students in Jim's new Catholic school go to church for confession. Although Jim was baptized in the Catholic faith, his parents are not church-goers and so he never received the sacraments of First Communion, Penance and Confirmation. When confession day arrives Jim contemplates trying to sneak away from school, but ultimately decides to remain with his classmates. When it is almost his turn, Jim tells the Brother that he has never been to confession before. The Brother insists that Jim take his turn anyway so Jim enters the confessional. Once inside, it is obvious that he doesn't know what to do, which he admits to the priest. The priest is very understanding, telling Jim he doesn't need to continue. The priest exits the confessional and berates the Brother for forcing Jim into the confessional. Jim feels vindicated and he is certain that the Brother will never bother him again. After school, Jim makes his way to his basketball game at which he scores 27 points.

On the day of Jim's last Bidly League game of the year, he attends a memorial service for Teddy Rayhill. While the priest is conducting the service he says that Teddy fell from the roof of his apartment building while trying to fix the TV antenna. Jim has heard that Teddy had been on the roof sniffing glue when he fell to his death. The service had to be stopped momentarily when Herbie and some of his friends began throwing bricks from the roof across the street. When the service concludes, the mourners have the opportunity to file past the casket and offer a prayer. Jim acknowledges that the entire ordeal made him feel badly.

Meanwhile, Jim's troubles in school continue. While his grades are not a problem, the teachers say that he does not make enough of an effort and so he is punished. Jim is usually punished with a thick rubber strap which is rapped across his knuckles. Jim isn't sure why he is subjected to this type of punishment, especially since he scored a 99 on his last test. He hates his school and wishes he could go back to public school but he also acknowledges that the teachers may have the right to boss him around. He describes one day in which three different students had epileptic fits within hours of each other. Each time a fit occurs help has to be summoned because the teacher does not know how to handle the situation. After the final episode, the exasperated teacher asks the class if anyone else was planning on having a fit. The upside of all the turmoil, in Jim's opinion, is that the teacher was not able to finish the lesson so there will be no test that week.

In another entry, Jim describes his first experience with heroin. It occurs one afternoon when Jim finds himself in the basement of Tony's apartment building. While he admits that he vowed years ago that he would never get involved in hard drugs like heroin, most of his friends are doing it so it is difficult for him to keep his resolve. On this



particular afternoon, Jim intends to just sniff a bag, but he soon tries the more serious drug. He describes the experience as, "one long heat wave all through my body, any ache I had flushed out."

Jim's involvement in thievery continues as he and his friend Ronnie make a visit to Alexander's, a large department store in the Bronx. They wear old coats which they found in their fathers' closets and they manage to steal \$150 worth of clothes. Many of the stolen items the boys sell to others. On their way home, Jim spots Freddie C., a man notorious in his neighborhood for flashing others in broad daylight. Jim is surprised to see Freddie as Jim had been certain that Freddie was locked up a long time ago. The fact that Freddie has taken his "act" to the Bronx amuses Jim and he wonders where he will wind up next. Before long; however, a police officer spots Freddie and takes him away in handcuffs.

Jim has noticed several differences between the kids in his old neighborhood and where he now lives; one of the biggest differences is in their attitude toward pot. Jim acknowledges that he has been smoking pot for over a year and is not addicted. Yet, whenever he offers pot to some of the guys in his new neighborhood, they accuse him of trying to get them hooked so that they will come back to buy more. Jim tries to tell them that pot is not addictive. He tells them that if it were, he would not be as good as he is at basketball. This intrigues the other boys and they ask him if they can smell the pot. Meanwhile, an older guy comes along and asks Jim if he has any pot to sell. Jim gives him a cigarette and they begin smoking. Before long, the two of them are high. Jim uses the same logic with his mother a few days later when she finds a bag of pot in his bedroom. Jim thinks he may have convinced her that pot is not addictive and that she has nothing to worry about, although he knows that she is angry.

Back at school, Mike Benavisti, one of Jim's classmates is having trouble with Brother G., a teacher notorious for bringing boys into a closet for their punishment. While Jim has never been a victim of this type of punishment, he knows what is involved. A boy caught committing an infraction on the rules is brought into a closet and asked to pull down his pants before being hit repeatedly with a rubber fan belt. At lunch, Mike shows his friends the welts he received from the beating and vows to get back at the teacher. The next day, Mike's older brother Vinnie bursts into the classroom and proceeds to beat up the teacher. Vinnie tells Brother G. that he has taken his share of beatings over the years and that he is not about to let his brother be subjected to the same punishment. Eventually, the fight ends and Vinnie takes Brother G. to the principal's office to tell him what has been going on. Brother G. is never seen in the school again.

Part 2 Analysis

In this part of the story, our suspicions that Jim may fall deeper into the world of drugs are confirmed. In the entry in which he describes his first experience with heroin, he admits that he has broken a promise he made to himself years earlier; he promised himself he wouldn't get involved with hard drugs. When he goes to Tony's basement, it is with the intent of "just" sniffing, but he gives in to the pressure of his friends and



decides to experiment with mainlining. Even so, he is adamant that he is not a hard-core drug user. In a later entry he tries to make it clear that he only uses heroin once in a great while. Jim's assertion that he couldn't be a good basketball player if he were addicted to hard drugs is his way of justifying his occasional use.

It is interesting the Jim feels it necessary to justify his limited drug use, but does not feel likewise obligated to address his regular use of alcohol and marijuana. Even in the streets of New York, it seems as though Jim's use of these two substances goes far beyond what would be considered "normal" for a boy of thirteen. Surprisingly, it is likely that Jim's use of pot and alcohol is not much different from that of his peers.

It is also becoming clear that Jim's parents most likely enrolled him in Catholic school for disciplinary reasons. While we still do not know to what extent his parents influence Jim's life, we do learn that they aren't concerned about his religious upbringing. Although his parents are Catholic, they do not attend church regularly. The teachers in the school are strict disciplinarians and corporal punishment is handed out with alarming frequency. Jim does not like this, but he does admit that perhaps the teachers do have the right to punish the students in this way. While Jim often speaks of "busting out" of the school or "getting back" at the teachers, he seems to follow the rules, implying that he has at least some respect for authority.

Jim does seem to receive much direction from his parents. In fact, to this point, the only reference he makes to his parents occur when he anticipates being beaten by his father for throwing up on the new rug and when his mother finds a small bag of marijuana in his room. It is becoming evident that his parents have control over Jim's actions, particularly when Jim is able to convince his mother that his use of marijuana is not anything to be concerned with. For a boy of thirteen, Jim is given far too much independence. It will probably only be a matter of time before he finds himself in deep trouble.

Jim does; however appear to be an intelligent young man. While his diary entries are peppered with the slang of the period, he conveys his thoughts clearly. Furthermore, Jim manages to score well on examinations in school which tells us that he is indeed smart.



Part 3

Part 3 Summary

This set of entries take place during the spring and summer of 1964.

Jim continues to be unhappy in his family's new Manhattan neighborhood. He is only able to find one boy in his school who will smoke pot with him and he frequently has to travel back to the old neighborhood in order to buy it. The only thing he likes about the neighborhood is that the nearby park has caves and tunnels that he enjoys exploring. He often finds himself alone, smoking pot, at the top of a cliff that overlooks the Hudson River. Jim wonders what it would be like to stay high all of the time and to live in the woods.

In another entry, Jim describes his nightly ritual. He waits until the rest of his family has fallen asleep and then sneaks out to the roof of his apartment building to masturbate. He climbs to the roof, strips off his clothes and stands naked in the soft summer night. He describes this as the most beautiful and exciting way to masturbate. Jim says he got the idea one night when he was on the roof watching a fire down the street and happened to see a young woman in the next building masturbating in her apartment. He has returned to the roof every night since. While the girl doesn't intrigue him as much anymore, he is grateful that she has introduced him to this particular pleasure.

Meanwhile, Jim's use of marijuana continues to escalate. He describes in one entry an evening in which he and his friend Willie shared an ounce of pot and some beer in the park. As they continue to drink and smoke, they get enormously giddy before turning somewhat paranoid. They become fearful that they will be discovered by the police who regularly patrol the area so they leave the park and go to a local bar that is notorious for serving minors. Eventually Jim leaves, but by this point he is quite drunk. He knows that he needs to report to his job at Yankee Stadium the next day; therefore, he decides to take the subway to a park near the stadium and sleep there. He is awakened the next morning by some Greeks who wanted to use the handball court he was sleeping on. At the stadium, Jim is told that he looked, "disgusting and needed a shave" so he wasn't permitted to work. Rather than go home, he goes back to the woods to smoke some more pot with Willie.

One of Jim's summer activities includes jumping from the cliffs that overlook the Harlem River. The trick to doing this is to time the jumps to avoid the clumps of raw sewage which empty into the river. On this particular day, Jim and his friends play a few games of basketball and down a few beers before heading up to the cliffs. Once there, they retrieve the bathing suits they had hidden in the bushes, bury their money so it is not stolen and proceed to change. As they are disrobing, they hear giggling behind them and discover that they are being watched by some teenage girls. They chase the girls and then finish changing.



With their suits on, the boys wait at the top of the highest cliff for The Circle Line tour ship to make its way up the river. When the ship is in sight, Danny □ the most experienced jumper of the three □ makes the plunge, to the delight of the tourists onboard. Johnny jumps next. Because it is Johnny's first jump from the cliff it takes him a few moments to summon his courage. When he finally hits the water, Jim jumps. The three boys swim ashore and as the tour ship passes, they moon the passengers before getting dressed and returning home.

On another night, after drinking beer in the park, Jim and his friends decide to steal some new basketballs from the park house equipment room to use in their pre-game warm-ups for next week's game. Satisfied with their haul of four brand new basketballs, the boys stow them at Danny's house before returning to the park. They are not there long when they are approached by a police car. Afraid that their theft has been discovered, the boys begin to run. The police pursue Jim and when they threaten to put a bullet in his leg, he finally stops running. Jim soon learns that a basketball rival of his, a kid named Louie Salvadorio, had just been mugged in the park and he was riding with the police in an effort to find the person who did it. When Louie identifies Jim as a basketball rival of his, the police officer asks Jim why he ran away. When Jim replies that he only ran because the others ran. The police officer whacks him in the knees with his nightstick before sending him on his way.

Jim eventually loses his job at Yankee Stadium. He has long been dissatisfied with this job because it seemed like he was always assigned the item that would never sell. For instance, he says he is always given ice cream on the coldest nights and hotdogs on Friday nights when a large portion of the crowd is made up of Catholics who don't eat meat on Fridays. On this particular evening, it begins to rain. After the majority of the crowd leaves their seats to take cover, Jim finds himself talking with two girls and smoking pot. He is soon discovered by Rudy, the foreman, who makes has a regular habit of checking up on Jim. Jim thinks that Rudy won't be able to positively identify him if he can get away fast enough so he decides to run. Unfortunately, Jim is soon caught and told never to return.

Jim's basketball team is playing in the Long Beach Chamber of Commerce Summer Basketball tournament so he and Willie make their way out to Long Beach on the train. When they arrive they stop for some pizza and are harassed by some of the local kids. A fight breaks out and is eventually stopped by another person who recognizes Jim and Willie as basketball players. Jim and his teammates win their game easily and then they go to a friend's house to party. The next night, Jim is still in Long Beach. After he spends some time drinking, Jim decides to try to pick up a girl. He is told that the Celia sisters are heading to the beach (Jim had a previous sexual experience with Alice Celia) so he goes looking for them. When some of the other guys spot Jim and Willie with the Celia sisters, word spreads and before long, there are several guys on the beach waiting to have a turn with one of the girls. Rather than take part in that, Jim and Willie decide to leave and practice foul shots.

Back at home, Jim and his friends are playing basketball at the Catholic school's youth night. When the priest in charge needs to leave early, he entrusts the keys to the hall to



Danny and asks him to lock up when they are finished. They decide to have an extra set of keys made before giving them back. The next day they learn that the local American Legion will be holding a dance in the school hall and that there are several cases of beer and liquor being stored there. Late that night, the boys use their keys to enter the school and they help themselves to several cases of liquor and beer. They take the liquor to the woods of a local park and find a safe spot to hide it.

A few days later, Jim finds himself in Long Beach again, this time to visit a friend whose family has a bungalow there. On the way there, he drinks two bottles of Codeine cough syrup. He finally arrives at Eddie's house and finds his friend smoking hash upstairs with two nice looking girls. The girls recognize Jim from the basketball tournament and begin to hint about having sex. When Jim realizes that all of the cough medicine that he has consumed may affect his performance, he decides to make himself throw up. Eventually, Jim and one of the girls move to another bedroom where they have sex. Afterward, the girl invites Jim to come to her place the next afternoon.

Part 3 Analysis

The majority of the entries in this section take place during the summer months, and from what we read, it is clear that Jim has plenty of time on his hands. Rather than putting this free time to good use; however, he spends the majority of the summer drinking and smoking pot. This is not to say that he has abandoned basketball. In this section of his diary, he plays on a team and spends at least some time practicing.

We begin to see that Jim's reputation as an up and coming basketball star is beginning to pay dividends. For example, on the evening that Jim is pursued by police because they think he was responsible for mugging another basketball player, the police officer lets him go, even though he ran from the officer and obviously has something to hide. A similar incident occurred in Long Beach when Willie and Jim are harassed by some local kids for their long hair. The fight with the kids is only settled because someone recognizes the boys as basketball players. In fact, the boy that instigates the fight is so impressed by Willie and Jim's status that he apologizes to them. Whether or not Jim understands the power that his status gives him is unclear at this point, but he is likely to realize it soon. It will be interesting to see how he uses this influence as the story unfolds.

We also see that Jim's drug use is starting to affect other areas of his life. When he reports to his job at Yankee Stadium after a night of drinking and pot smoking, he looks so disheveled that he is sent home. Eventually, he loses this job because he is caught smoking pot when he was supposed to be working. The loss of his job doesn't seem to bother Jim and since his later diaries do not mention whether or not he finds another one, we assume that he spends the remainder of the summer unemployed.

What we do know about Jim's summer is that he spends nearly every day drinking. As we read the various diary entries, it quickly becomes evident that he has developed a dependence on alcohol and at this point, it is probably accurate to say that Jim is an



alcoholic. Aside from the nightly parties that take place in the woods of the neighborhood park, Jim drinks in the afternoons and before basketball games. It seems that he drinks every chance he gets. In addition to drinking, Jim's use of drugs seems to be increasing as is evident when he consumes two bottles of cough syrup on the train ride out to Long Beach and in his use of hash.

Jim has also become much more sexually active. For a boy of fifteen, he seems to be quite experienced, which implies that he has had more than the handful of encounters that he describes in his diary. It is obvious that to Jim, sex is merely another activity, not unlike drinking or using drugs, that he engages in to pass the time.

As in the other sections of the book we have read so far, Jim does not write much about his family or his parents. Even so, we know that his parents have at least some idea of Jim's drug and drinking habits. In addition to the incident described in the prior section in which his mother finds some marijuana that Jim has been hiding, we learn in this section that when he calls his mother after spending the evening drinking in Long Beach, his mother knows that he is drunk.

Considering that there are tangible clues regarding Jim's use of drugs and alcohol, one wonders why his parents don't confront him. It is obvious that Jim's basketball skills have the potential to lead him to great things as they have already helped him to secure a scholarship to a prestigious private school. The fact that Jim could lose everything because of his drug use and drinking must be troubling to them. Unfortunately, because Jim does not share much about his parents in his diary, we are unable to understand why he is allowed to behave in this manner.

Despite Jim's frequent drinking and drug use, he remains faithful to his diary and makes frequent entries. Because these entries are clearly written and easy to understand, it is evident that despite what many of the entries imply, there must be periods during which he is sober.



Part 4

Part 4 Summary

These entries are made during the Fall of 1964.

Jim begins classes at the private school to which he was awarded a scholarship. While Jim already knows that he is way out of his league socially, his teachers make sure to point this out to him as well. On his first day, he is reprimanded for answering a question with "yah" rather than the required "yes, sir." At lunch he is instructed to keep the hand that is not using his fork hidden from view. Later, that day another student tries to bully him into giving up a magazine he has been reading, an act which results in Jim punching the boy in the face. Fortunately, another student comes to Jim's defense and saves him from being sent to the principal's office.

Before long, Jim is given detention as punishment for cutting classes too often. Although part of the detention process involves cleaning desks, Jim manages to evade the work and spends his detention time reading in the bathroom. When he is finally released, he makes his way back to his old neighborhood to attend the wake of a friend who died from leukemia. Jim sees many old friends at the wake and spends a lot of time talking with them so that he can avoid having to view the body. Jim finally goes to pay his respects and is so shaken by what he sees that one the way home that, he takes two reds to calm himself down.

During the warm weather months, Jim's PE class walks a few blocks to nearby Central Park to play touch football. Jim doesn't like the school's required gym uniform and particularly hates being ridiculed for wearing it by the people they pass in the neighborhood. As a result, even though it is against the school's regulations, Jim usually wears jeans. Because the physical education teacher is also Jim's basketball coach, he is able to get away with this as long as the school's headmaster doesn't see him.

On one particular day, Jim lags behind the rest of the class on the way to the park so that he can smoke some marijuana on the way. He finally reaches the field and, although he is fairly stoned, he plays football with his class. On the way back to the school, he ducks into some bushes to finish his joint but he is discovered by two horse patrol police officers. Although Jim manages to throw the joint away before he is seen, the police officers are still suspicious. As Jim tries to talk his way out of his predicament, he realizes that one of the officers is his boyhood little league coach. Soon the officer is telling his partner all about Jim's athletic accomplishments and they let Jim return to school.

One of Jim's friends fixes him up with an afternoon blind date to see some old Bogart movies. Soon after meeting the girl, she asks Jim if he uses pot. Jim can tell from the tone of her voice that he should tell her that he does not. Later, when he tries to put his arm around her, she brushes him off saying that, "there is a time and a place for



everything." When it happens again later, he becomes clearly frustrated and agitated. Even though he is frustrated he agrees to go back to her apartment (her parents are out of town) and she quickly suggests that they go into the bedroom. She now tells that, "there is a time and a place for everything and this is the time."

Part 4 Analysis

Until now, Jim has not have had much of an opportunity, or the need, to interact with people outside of his own social class. However, as a direct result of his basketball abilities, he now finds himself in an elite private school. He knows he is only there because of his basketball skills, but he doesn't seem to appreciate the opportunity he has been given, instead he soon gets himself into trouble. In fact, on his very first day he manages to avoid a trip to the principal's office only because another student spoke up on his behalf.

We see that Jim is also taking fuller advantage of his status as a basketball star. There are a few instances of his use of his status in this section. His ability to shun the school's uniform for physical education class and get away with it and his ability to skirt trouble when he is caught smoking pot in the woods by his former little league coach are examples of his use of his new prestige. It is clear that Jim is starting to realize that his basketball abilities have given him a power that the other students don't have. He has no problem using that power to his advantage.

Finally, we see that Jim hasn't curtailed his drug use. He regularly smokes pot on his way to and from gym class. In one entry, we learn that he has also takes barbiturates, indicating that his drug use is graduating from recreational to a more addictive pattern.

Yet, at least on some level, Jim must feel that his drug use is wrong because he opts not to tell Melody, the girl his friend fixes him up with, about his marijuana use. This is an interesting choice because up until this point, Jim did not seem to care how he was perceived by others.



Part 5

Part 5 Summary

These entries take place during the Winter of 1965.

Jim's first basketball game of the season is memorable, not because of the outcome, but because mid-way through the game, his shorts rip and his rear-end is exposed to the entire gym. When he finally does discover the rip, it takes almost a full minute before the game can be stopped so that he can get himself new shorts.

Jim has two friends, Brian and John Browning, who live in an apartment in the neighborhood. Jim frequently spends time there and has even lived there occasionally when his parents have thrown him out. One weekend, Jim and Brian set out in search of some codeine for the afternoon. They go to their usual destination, but are denied because the owner says he has been hassled about selling drugs to minors. They call a mutual friend who suggests another place. The boys make their way to the recommended place and purchase two bottles of codeine each. On their way back to the apartment, they pick up some beer and then settle in for an afternoon in a codeine-induced stupor.

In another entry, Jim describes a strange, almost overwhelming, urge he sometimes has to fire a machine gun. He is quick to point out that he doesn't have the desire to hurt or kill anyone, he just feels he has a need to release some tension in this way. Similarly, when he is on the toilet, he often imagines what he would do if he were suddenly attacked. As he thinks about his reactions, he looks around the room to see what he can use to protect himself. And then, just as soon as he is finished, the fantasy ends. Jim isn't sure what this all means, but he says he feels safer knowing what he would do if he were attacked.

Jim has also started attending Communist Party meetings with his friend Bunty. Although the speeches bore him, he enjoys the people. His father is not impressed with his new interest and suggests that he should spend his time doing his homework instead.

Jim is surprised to learn that although the kids in his school come from some of New York's richest families, they are stealing from him. He is incensed because five dollars and some pot he was hoping to sell on another occasion, was stolen from his pants while he was showering after gym class one day. Jim decides that it is time to get even so he cuts study hall in order to go through the lockers belonging to the members of the wrestling team. He is nearly through when a classmate who is serving as his lookout whispers that the principal is on his way. Because he knows that the principal is most likely on the hunt for students cutting class, Jim decides to try to avoid him by hiding in a locker. When he thinks the principal is finally a safe distance away, he tries to exit the locker, but finds that it can only be opened from the outside. He waits, hoping



that someone will come to his rescue, but to no avail. He begins to yell and he is eventually freed by another student.

Before the start of another basketball game, Jim and one of his teammates head to Central Park in search of some uppers. They finally find someone who is selling uppers and downers. Jim and some of his friends plan to go back to the Browning's apartment after the game for a codeine "party." As a result, they buy ten of each type of pill: uppers to get them through the game and downers to bring them down enough to get the most from their codeine consumption. Unfortunately, neither Jim nor his friends remember which pills were the uppers and which pills were the downers. After a great deal of debate, the boys pick the pills that they believe are the uppers and take them. The game gets off to a good start and Jim's team is up by seven points. Midway through the second quarter; however, Jim and his teammates realize that they have taken the wrong pills. By halftime, their team is down eighteen points and their coach is furious. When the team reaches the locker room, Jim and his three teammates are ordered by the coach to get dressed, leave the building and report with him to the school's headmaster on Monday morning. The boys do as they are instructed and head to the apartment for their codeine party.

Part 5 Analysis

In this section, some of our questions regarding Jim's parents' tolerance of his drug use and other questionable activities are answered. Although the reference is fleeting and no further explanation or elaboration is provided, we learn that Jim's parents have, on more than one occasion, thrown him out of the house. This implies that they are aware of his drug use and are not willing to tolerate it. While this is obviously good, it does seem to be an extreme reaction, especially since that Jim is only fifteen years of age. There are certain assumptions we can now make about Jim's home life. First, it is probably true that while his parents do not condone or tolerate his drug use, they feel powerless to stop it. Rather than trying to get Jim help, their solution is to remove him from the home so that they do not need to acknowledge the problem.

Secondly, the description that most likely fits Jim's family is, "working class poor." Consequently, they don't have the financial resources needed to get Jim help and they are reluctant to admit that one of their family members has a problem. Further, as is common in many families of this type, conversations generally degenerate to name calling and overuse of obscenities. The entry in which Jim tries to describe the Communist Party meetings he has been attending with his new school friends to his father illustrates Jim's trouble communicating with his father. His father's response and his choice of language ("I am the proletariat, you dumb bastard...and I think those motherfuckers are off their rockers") is not typical of the way most fathers talk to their fifteen year old sons.

We also see continued evidence of Jim's escalating drug problems. He appears to be a seasoned codeine user and now uses uppers before basketball games. The entry in which he describes the episode in which he and his teammates are unable to discern

between the uppers and the downers is somewhat comical although it indicates that drugs have begun to get a firmer grip on Jim's life. The fact that he is willing to risk losing his scholarship and the chance at future basketball stardom by using drugs before a game, particularly drugs he can't even positively identify, tells us that he is getting in over his head that the consequences will eventually be dire.



Part 6

Part 6 Summary

The entries in this section of the diary take place during the Spring of 1965.

On the Monday following the basketball game in which Jim and three of his teammates are asked to leave, Jim decides that rather than face the consequences of his actions, he will instead skip school. Jim calls the school and tells the principal's secretary that he is sick. Jim then goes out and eventually finds himself outside of a movies theater where he spots a nice looking hooker. The woman summons him over and suggests that they go into the movies. Once inside, the two go up to the balcony where they discover that they are alone. As they begin to make out, Jim realizes to his horror that the woman is actually a man. Jim runs from the theater and makes his way to the penny arcade where he hustles another kid for ten dollars.

Riding the train on his way to school, Jim runs into Bobby Blake, an old friend, who tells Jim that he had recently been arrested for breaking into a neighborhood luncheonette. While Bobby is now free on bail, he has a trial coming up within the next week. A few days later, as Jim is on his way to the Browning's apartment, he hears a commotion at the end of the block and discovers that it was caused by Bobby. As he was when he broke into the luncheonette, Bobby is high. Bobby has broken into a men's clothing store and is handing out pants to the passersby. The police arrive and haul Bobby away.

One evening, as Jim's mother is sorting through the day's mail, she finds a letter from Jim's school. The letter requests that his parents come in for a meeting to discuss Jim's behavior. The letter refers to Jim's report card and so his mother asks him why she hasn't seen it. Jim lies and tells her that he heard the school had some trouble mailing them out. In fact, he came home early one day so that he could intercept and destroy it before his parents were able to see it.

Although Jim's school has a rule against leaving the grounds during the school day, he and his friends regularly leave after lunch to get high. One day, they leave in search of some heroin. While their original intent was to return to school and sniff the heroin during math class, they run into a guy who offers them his basement to shoot up in provided they share the heroin with him. The boys agree and soon find themselves in a nearby basement. Once they finish, they leave and are stopped by a police officer who asks why they were in the basement. Jim tells the officer that they were taking a survey for a school social work project. The officer buys the story and the boys return to school.

Another day, Jim runs into a little girl who asks him why his hair is so long. When Jim replies that he likes it that way, she asks him if he is against the war. Jim tells her that he is and then she asks if he believes in God. Jim tells the girl that his belief is probably different from hers and then asks her if she thinks Christ would fight in the war. When the girl says she thinks He would, Jim asks her if she ever read about Him killing or



using a gun. When the girl says she hasn't, Jim asks again if she thinks He would fight in the war. She replies that no, she guesses He wouldn't.

Part 6 Analysis

As we suspected would be the case, Jim's academic performance in school is not very good. Obviously, Jim is well aware of this as he intercepts and destroys his report card. One of the interesting things we learn from this episode is that one of his parents apparently belongs to the Bartender's Union and we can assume from this that one of them works as a bartender. It is likely then, that the parent working as a bartender is a heavy drinker and quite possibly, even an alcoholic. This simple fact may help to identify the origin of Jim's dependence on drugs and alcohol. Jim is merely following his parents' example.

The other significant thing that occurs during this section is that Jim unwittingly finds himself being seduced by another man. His reaction is typical of most men or young men finding themselves in similar circumstances, he says he thought he would, "freak on the spot." Not surprisingly, Jim finds himself alone with the man/woman because he is promised some pot, yet another indication of the depth of his dependence. Further support of this comes in the entry in which he describes his habit of regularly leaving school to search for drugs.

Finally, because there is no further mention of the episode in which Jim and his teammates are asked to leave a basketball game, we can assume that they managed to escape from any serious consequences.



Part 7

Part 7 Summary

It is the Summer of 1966 and Jim's drug use continues. He is also prostituting himself to gay men to make money to support his habit. Unfortunately, he finds that the clientele is getting progressively kinkier. Jim contemplates taking a break from prostitution and returning to safer activities, such as stealing from old ladies. One of his clients, a man named Dave, pays him fifty dollars merely to attend a Yankees double-header with him. Jim finds this particularly amusing especially since he spent so much time working at Yankee Stadium. When the double-header goes longer than expected, Jim tells Dave that he wants seventy-five dollars to cover his extra time. Dave gives Jim one hundred dollars. In another instance, a man takes Jim to his hotel room. They enter the bathroom where Jim finds that the man has a bubble bath waiting as well as a cat tied to the toilet. The man asks Jim to urinate on him, use a whip to kill the cat, and then masturbate into his mouth. Instead, Jim frees the cat, punches the guy out, and takes sixty dollars from the man's wallet.

Early one morning, Jim and his friends decide to head out in search of some food when they discover a bloody, naked woman laying on the sidewalk outside the apartment building where they are staying. Jim quickly finds himself at the woman's side, holding her hand while his friend Joey goes to call the police. Soon, Jim realizes that the woman had jumped from a fifth story window. The police arrive and take the woman's body away. Jim returns to the apartment, takes a hit of heroin, and tries to forget about what has happened.

Jim is becoming increasingly disgusted by the men who hit on him when he goes into a public restroom such as those found in Grand Central Terminal. On one occasion, he is on his way to Rye, New York, to visit an old friend when he stops to use the restroom. While he says he is accustomed to seeing men masturbate in the restrooms, he does not like it when they try to grab him. He finishes what he needs to do, and quickly exits the restroom.

In one entry, Jim recounts an experience that happened when he was nine years old. He and his friend Kenny were playing in the basement of their apartment building one rainy day when a girl named Sharron and her friend Lou-Lou came in and suggested that they play Doctor. As part of the game, Sharron suggested that Jim and Kenny remove their pants. The boys obliged and the girls undressed as well. When they did, Jim realized that the girls were actually boys and, consequently, Jim had his first exposure to drag queens.

When Jim's team loses their game in a summer league tournament, he nevertheless returns to gym the next day to watch the championship game and to pick up his trophy for being named to the all-league team. When he arrives, there is a controversy brewing regarding the use of illegal players. Jim finds is handed a uniform and asked if he wants



to play. He agrees and ends up scoring forty-seven points. When the game is over and a photographer from the local Harlem newspaper gets the team together for a photograph, Jim is asked not to be in the picture. Jim surmises that they don't want the readers to know that the game's high scorer was actually a white player.

On another day, Jim and his friends are incredibly hungry because they have spent a great deal of time smoking pot in the woods of the local park. They realize that they don't have enough money between them for even one hamburger so they devise a plan to steal some food. Jim and his friend Barry go into a local burger place and order 27 burgers and nine cokes, telling the guy at the counter that they have a big poker game going on. The guy prepares the food and once it is all put into bags, Jim and Barry grab it and run.

Since he is tired of the New York City summer heat, Jim decides to take the train to Rye, to visit a friend. On his way, Jim stops for a bottle of codeine and a beer and goes to the restroom to consume it, before boarding the train. Jim is drinking in a bathroom stall when he discovers that the guy in the next stall is attempting to grab him. Jim kicks the guy in the face and heads for the train. As the train pulls into the first stop, Jim decides to go into the bathroom to smoke a joint. On his way back to his seat, he is almost breaks into a fit of laughing so he struggles to maintain his composure. As he walks slowly back to his seat, he feels as though every pair of eyes on the train is looking right at him as if they all know what he was doing in the bathroom. Finally reaching his seat, he spends the rest of the trip alternating between being afraid and being amused.

When he returns from Rye, Jim realizes that he has picked up "the clap" from a girl he was with. This is Jim's first experience with VD and he isn't sure how to handle it. He calls a friend who gives him the address of a doctor who will give him antibiotics for \$8. Jim makes his way to the office and gets two shots and some pills. A few hours later he feels much better.

As the summer winds down, Jim decides that it is time that he tried to cut down his drug consumption. He knows that he will need to be clean to get through the school year. He realizes that he no longer has his drug use under control and that he needs to do something, but because he has been using heroin nearly every day for the past three months he feels powerless to stop. Jim worries about how he will be handle staying clean when others around him are using drugs and he thinks that perhaps it would be better if he moved away.

Part 7 Analysis

It is summer and as we have seen from the entries taking place during previous summers, Jim's drug use has increased. As he mentions in the last entry for the summer, he has been using heroin nearly every day for the last three months. Additionally, he seems to have developed a strong sense of paranoia, as evidenced by his experience on the train



We also see Jim's paranoia in less obvious ways. There are numerous diary entries in which Jim laments that he feels as though all of the "queers" in the city are after him. While it is true that he seems to be approached quite often, in reality, it is probably no less often than any other young man under the same circumstances. He also describes some rather "colorful" sexual fantasies which suggest that perhaps he is using other drugs such as LSD.

Jim's reaction to the woman who commits suicide is also interesting. Unlike his friends, who are paralyzed by what they see, Jim immediately goes to the woman's side and holds her hand as she dies. When the episode ends, Jim returns to his friend's apartment and takes some heroin in an effort to forget what has just happened.

However, despite all of this, Jim continues to excel in basketball, scoring forty-seven points in one tournament game and being named to the all-tournament team. The extent of his drug use during the games is unknown, but based on his performance, it would appear that he did not use during the games. The fact that he continues to play is testament to Jim's love of the game as it is not unusual for someone with a pronounced drug problem to turn away from activities they once enjoyed.

As the summer begins to draw to a close and Jim faces the prospect of returning to school, he begins to realize that he must do something about his drug use. By his own admission, his ability to control his drug use is nearly non-existent and he fears that he has crossed the line from a recreational user to a hard-core addict. Jim feels all of the tell-tale physical signs but he says he also keeps hearing a "little voice" that urges him to have one more hit. Jim feels powerless to quiet this voice and he worries that even if he does quit, he won't be able to withstand the pressure from his drug-using friends. This is the first time we have seen Jim admit that he has a serious problem and while this is certainly an important step, it is difficult to imagine that he will be able to quit without some serious help.

Part 8

Part 8 Summary

The entries in this section of the book take place during the Fall of 1965.

Jim has returned to school, but we quickly learn that he has not stopped his drug habit. He has learned from a senior in his school that the "best" girls go to The Professional Children's School and so, in an effort to meet some of them, he has been hanging out at a local sandwich shop. He takes note of how dedicated each of the students are to their particular art; dance, drama or modeling. The girls frequently ask Jim what he is studying and while he once was a child model for Johnson & Johnson baby products, he does not let them know this. He also notices that most of these kids don't have any real friends because they spend so much time practicing. Jim says that he hangs around with this group for two reasons; first, it's an ego trip to say that his girlfriend is on television and second, there are a few rich sluts in the crowd.

Jim is still spending time at the Browning's apartment, a place he has dubbed "headquarters." Jim writes that once a month, the apartment is cleaned by whatever group of girls they find to do the job. As each month progresses, the place falls further and further into disarray so that by the end of the month, it is hardly livable. The filth doesn't bother Jim. Jim thinks that all that matters is that the apartment provides a safe place where he can smoke dope, watch television, and feel the contentment of being surrounded by friends.

One of Jim's friends who was recently arrested on possession charges tells Jim that on his way to the police station, he overheard the officers trying to decide how much of the confiscated drugs they should turn in for evidence and how much they should keep to sell on the streets. Jim is incensed at this and he thinks that all of the police are corrupt. Jim wonders how many people know what goes on with the drugs they seize.

On a trip to the country with a friend, Jim takes some L.S.D. and spends a great deal of time studying the trees to determine which are friendly and which are evil. They stay in the country until morning. When the sun begins to rise, Jim goes to a nearby field to watch the tall grass wave. He says that the grass soon took on the shapes of fingers which beckoned to him. He goes into the field and rolls in the grass. Jim says that his body was transformed into a sort of spirit and that he seemed to roll effortlessly through the grass. He continues this for hours until he finally realizes that he has left the field and is now in the middle of a golf course. Because the golfers are watching him, Jim quickly gets up and returns to the woods where he finds Willie waiting for him.

Jim now uses L.S.D. on a regular basis. To Jim it is no different than getting drunk on Friday nights. As is normal when he takes L.S.D., Jim spends a great deal of time studying the architecture of the buildings around him, he takes particular notice of the gargoyles and cornices of the buildings. When it gets too cold to remain outside, Jim



and his friends stop by the apartment of someone Jim knows. When the boy answers the door, Jim realizes that he doesn't really know who Jim is. He lets them in anyway and they spend the evening listening to music and smoking pot. At one point, Jim finds himself intently watching some fish swimming in a nearby tank and thinks that one of them has turned transparent.

In another entry, Jim describes a recent party that took place at their Headquarters. The party was being held in honor of a friend who was leaving for the army and Jim says that it seemed as though every, "dope head in upper Manhattan was there." To avoid the "moochers" who were begging for a hit of their heroin Jim and his friend Mancole go to the roof to shoot up. Around midnight, two police officers arrive saying that they have received a noise complaint. After checking some identification and tossing a few under-aged kids out, they leave. Jim manages to escape their check because he is quietly sitting in the corner, feeling the effects of the heroin.

When the 1965 blackout hits, Jim is on his way home from school. He is on the subway when the power goes out. Jim and his friend Lang do some heroin while they wait. After about an hour, it is obvious that the train isn't going anywhere. The boys realize that the other passengers are making their way to the front of the train and getting off as the train. Fortunately the train had stopped near a station. When they exit the station, the boys learn that the entire city is without power and that a good portion of the east coast is probably blacked out as well. Jim is seventy-five blocks from home and he is carrying a big bag of books and a bag of dirty gym laundry. A newspaper delivery truck stops nearby and the driver tells Jim that he can take him partway home. Jim accepts the ride and then "borrows" a delivery bicycle he sees outside of a market to get him the rest of the way home. Jim finally reaches home and has dinner with his family. Jim and his brother then go out to meet with some friends. They agree that this is the perfect night to break into the park house for some new basketballs. While the others drink a bottle of booze that they found in the park attendant's locker, Jim shoots up some heroin and they leave.

In another entry, Jim tries to figure out the cause of the difficulties between him and his father. He thinks a lot of it has to do with the customers that his father deals with on a daily basis in the bar where he works. Jim refers to them as a group of big gossips and knows that they constantly ask his father why Jim wears his hair so long and if he is anti-war. They wonder what Jim is being taught in, "that fancy pinko school he goes to."

Jim lays off heroin for about a month. When Jim starts using again and he comes dangerously close to being caught by the police as he and a friend are shoot up in the park. After this episode, Jim realizes that he has to find a safer place to shoot up. Headquarters was out because another guy overdosed there and now there was a "no shooting" rule there. Jim decides that he will have to continue to shoot up in the park until he is able to quit.

Jim writes that the situation in his home has gone from bad to worse. When his father comes home after working at the bar, he takes off his shoes, puts his feet up, and spends the rest of the evening complaining about everything from Jim's hair to the war



protesters. Meanwhile, Jim's mother tries to bait him into political conversations which usually escalate into screaming matches.

Part 8 Analysis

In the first entry of this section, we learn that Jim has not kicked his drug habit. If anything, it has gotten worse. He writes of his frequent L.S.D. use and describes some of the rather vivid scenes he imagines when he is under the drug's influence. On another occasion, he talks about standing on the roof watching, "secret U.F.O.s zipping over the horizon." It is clear that the constant drug use is having a serious effect on Jim's brain. Despite this, he is still in private school and playing basketball. He is also trying to succeed academically because, he mentions in the entry describing the blackout, that he had taken a whole bagful of books home with him that day.

As is often the case with habitual drug users, Jim is developing a sense of paranoia. While this has been briefly referred to in other entries, the concept comes up several times within this section. We first read about it when he mentions that the sound of air raid drills "freak" him, particularly when he is stoned. He refers to it again in the entry in which he describes being stuck in the subway car during the blackout, "□plus the fact that there were no tunnel lights on either side made for more A-bomb paranoia." He is also quite paranoid about being caught using drugs whenever he is in the park and he often wishes that there were a safer place where he could go.

Based on these examples, we see that his paranoia seems to take two forms; the first is a belief that he (and the rest of his community) is going to be attacked as the result of some sort of Communist conspiracy; the second is an overwhelming fear that he will be caught taking drugs. While the latter is certainly a natural and understandable fear, it has also caused Jim to take risks that could jeopardize his basketball career. For instance, he leaps from a wall and makes a ten foot drop to avoid being caught taking drugs by the police, who are patrolling the park. He lands hard and luckily only twists, rather than breaks, his ankle.

Thus, we see that Jim is actually risking his future in two ways. The first, most obvious way lies in the fact that he uses drugs. The second involves the lengths he must go to in order to keep from being caught. The fact that he is willing to take these types of risks indicates that the drugs have a very strong hold on Jim and it is unlikely that he will be able to give them up without a considerable amount of help.

Although it seems as if Jim is heading toward a lifetime of drug addiction, he continues to give us indications that he would like to get clean. As the last section ended, Jim wrote about trying to kick his heroin habit before school started. In this section, he shares a poem that he had written about a prior experience with L.S.D. One of the lines in the poem reads, "I just want to be pure" which is an indication that Jim feels as though his addiction is too strong for him to break. In the journal entry where he discusses his need to find a safe place to shoot up he says, "I guess it's the park or nothing unless I can cut loose, which I ought to be doing soon 'cause its starting to get heavy, starting to



be that time I better get my ass together." In this one sentence, we see that Jim recognizes that he is heading toward addiction and that it is time for him to stop.

Finally, we are given another small glimpse into Jim's family life as he describes the typical evening in his home. Both of his parents seem to be very discontent with their own lives and they seem to derive pleasure from trying to bait Jim into an argument. As a result, conversations usually degenerate into screaming fights. He also provides an indication that he realizes that his drug problem has had an effect on his parents, when he says, "□you can ignore and induce ulcers and heart pangs and give them grey hair□ and then you begin to cry in the closet because your veins are sore□" And, while up until this point Jim has displayed an ambivalent attitude toward his family, in this entry he makes an attempt to describe his feelings for them when he writes, "□you can't get over the fact that you love them somehow more or at least always."

Part 9

Part 9 Summary

The entries in this section of Jim's diary take place during the Winter of 1966.

In the first entry, Jim brings up a recurring fantasy in which he brings a machine gun into school and opens fire during his first class of the day. While he is at a loss to explain why he continues to have these thoughts, he believes that part of it has to do with the fact that before school begins, he usually stops by the apartment of a friend to either smoke dope or shoot up. Once he is in class, he finds himself lapsing into a fantasy in which he is in the midst of a battlefield being approached by the enemy. When he eventually emerges from this fantasy, he finds himself wishing for just one chance to use a machine gun to, "cut the place to ribbons."

While Jim admits that he is not as afraid of being bombed as he had been a few years earlier, he says he is still fairly paranoid. Jim says that he manages this fear by making it a way of life. Jim regularly wishes that if the end of the world is inevitable, it would at least wait until he has finished some important project, played in a big game, or achieved a particular milestone. He now recognizes that fear is a tool used by the enemy and he acknowledges that it is a very powerful tool. Jim still uses this fear to measure his time but instead of hoping that the attack will wait until after the game, Jim hopes he will have time to finish the poems he wants to write and find out whether or not he is the writer he knows he can be.

Jim has been selected to play in the National High School All Star Basketball tournament in Washington, D.C. and so he travels there with some other players from New York City. Once there, he and another player sneak out of the hotel in search of prostitutes. They return to their rooms at around midnight and are greeted by the coach who tells both boys that they won't be able to play in the first game. Jim knows this is an empty threat because without them, the team won't have enough guys to play. Jim and his friend each smoke two joints in the shower before going to bed. As expected, the next morning, the coach tells them they are getting a second chance and that they will be able to play. Jim discovers that another of his teammates has a fairly large stash of "up" pills. Nearly the entire team reports to practice stoned and, despite his condition, Jim finds himself hitting the majority of his shots which virtually assures him a starting position in the game.

Shortly after returning from Washington, D.C., Jim receives a telephone call from Benny Greenbaum, a college scout who is also notoriously gay. Benny wants Jim to play on his basketball team and invites him to his apartment to be fitted for a uniform. Since Benny has come on to Jim in the past, he is somewhat hesitant to go, but Benny assures him there is nothing to worry about. Once at Jim arrives at Benny's apartment Benny tries to seduce him. Jim flees the apartment but not without first grabbing the uniform that Benny had promised him.



One night, after Jim has finished playing basketball with some old friends in Harlem, one of the guys offers to buy them drinks. On their way, the boys stop to smoke some pot and then they head to the bar. There have been several race riots in the recent weeks and Jim feels a little uncomfortable in a predominately black bar. Jim's friend assures him he will be safe. As they sit and talk, two men suddenly whip out guns and announce that the bar is being held up. The bartender gives them the contents of the cash register and then they go from patron to patron and take whatever they have. Jim has only fifty cents plus a subway token on him. The thieves take the money but let him keep the token.

In one brief entry, Jim says he is having difficulties writing. It is clear from the few fragmented sentences that he manages to write that his difficulties are largely due to the fact that he is stoned.

Jim says it is common knowledge around his school that he and two of his teammates are usually high for each basketball game. Jim knows that the opposing teams know this and they try their best to take advantage of his condition. After one game, a game for which ironically Jim wasn't high, he is called into the headmaster's office and asked about his drug use. Jim denies having taken drugs during school or before games and the headmaster takes him at his word. Jim and his teammates take the precaution of moving their drugs and paraphernalia from their gym lockers to an empty locker they found in the visitor's locker room. The next day, they learn that the principal has been contacted by the police regarding the drug use within the school and that all of the lockers in the school are going to be searched. The students all make a mad dash to clear their lockers and Jim and his friends decide that it is time to stop dealing drugs in school for awhile.

In addition to various girlfriends his own age, Jim occasionally sees an older woman on weekends. The woman is actually the mother of an old girlfriend of Jim's and she is very rich. The woman has an insatiable appetite for sex but Jim says that all too often, his body cannot respond due to all of the drugs in his system. The other problem is that she likes Jim to dress up in drag and pretend that he is her daughter. Jim soon gets tired of this and tells the woman that he wants to have more conventional sex. She resists at first, but he insists and forces her. The relationship ends badly one night when Jim who is strung out because he does not have the money for his daily fix, shows up at her apartment with a friend to ask for money. She gives him the money and Jim sends his friend out for the drugs. He isn't feeling well and wants to lie down, but the woman tries to pressure him into sex. When she doesn't quit, Jim storms out.

One afternoon, Jim and his friend are having a hard time finding a dealer to buy drugs from. They're not too panicked as they have had their "wake-up" shots but still would like something for later in the day. After visiting their usual spots, they head to the park where they find another dealer who is also out, but she refers them to someone else. They buy \$20 of brown heroin that was supposedly imported from Mexico. They take it to their headquarters and Jim decides that they should taste the powder to make sure it is actually heroin. To his disgust, he finds that the powder it's Ovaltine not heroin.



Jim also finds that he is throwing up after every shot of heroin. This is a new development and he wonders what the powder is being cut with. One of his friends is having the same problem, but two others aren't. Jim says he is throwing up four times a day and he is beginning to enjoy it.

When Jim runs into an old friend from his Bidly League days he learns that Herbie is in jail on murder charges. They begin reminiscing about the other members of the Boys' Club team and his friend tells him that most of them are either drug addicts or in jail. Jim then asks about one particular person, a boy known as Bobo. When his friend tells him that Bobo died of a drug overdose, Jim says that he never liked the guy anyway and Jim tells the story of when Bobo spit on him from the balcony above the gym floor. When Jim finishes his story, his friend tells him that Bobo was his brother.

Shortly after this, Jim is arrested for possession of heroin and sent to the Riker's Island Juvenile Reformatory for three months. This is the second time that Jim has been busted. The first time, the judge suspended the charge but assured Jim he would be sent away if he appeared before him again. Jim makes two short entries while he is at Riker's but he says he's not interested in writing. Jim also says that his mother refuses to visit him.

Part 9 Analysis

In this section, we see that Jim's life is continuing to spiral out of control. He admits that he goes to school high nearly every day and that he usually plays basketball while under the influence of drugs. He also implies that he is dealing drugs in school when he tells us that he and his friends have decided to, "cool all enterprise for the time being," when they learn that the school is being searched for drugs. The fact that Jim deals drugs is confirmed a little later in the section when Jim writes about being beat up by someone who wasn't happy with his purchase.

We also see that Jim's body is starting to show the signs of regular drug use. When he goes to the apartment of the older woman he has been seeing he is desperate for money to buy more drugs because he is in a cold sweat and having severe leg cramps. In another entry, he says he is now regularly throwing up, as much as four times a day, after shooting up.

Meanwhile, his bizarre dreams and fantasies are becoming more frequent and more vivid. This section begins with Jim once again mentioning the strong desire he has to use a machine gun to destroy his English class. In another entry, he talks about his desire to write, equating poetry with a raw block of stone waiting to be shaped. While this is a good analogy, he soon launches into a tirade about getting even for all of the nights he spent alone in his bed terrified of being bombed. Later, he describes tying off with a woman's silk stocking before shooting up and seeing the blood rise into the dropper of the syringe. He says that writing is becoming more difficult, most likely because his head is too clouded from the effects of the heroin. Perhaps the most telling example is the dream that he describes toward the end of the section. While most of the



dream isn't particularly significant, at the very end, as the girl in the dream is being taken home, the word "home" was repeated several times. Jim says that the dream left him with the knowledge that there is, "an incredible love somewhere in my world," and that he felt sad. In this dream, we see once again that Jim subconsciously recognizes the fact that all of his relationships are with his fellow drug addicts. This dream provides a powerful indication of Jim's desire to kick his drug habit so that he can focus on developing real relationships.

It is no secret that Jim seems to be capable of forming relationships only with those who share his drug habit. His closest friends are all drug users and he maintains a sexual relationship with an older woman so that she will give him money for drugs. While the woman insists on engaging in a number of bizarre sexual practices, Jim goes along with it because he knows that she will give him the money he needs. At school he associates only with other drug users. He seems to have drifted even further from his parents as can be seen by his comment that he has been spending most of his weekends at Headquarters. He has mentioned his desire to clean up his act in the past and while a great deal of this is likely based on the fact that he cannot spend the rest of his life this way, part of this desire is probably due to his desire for more meaningful relationships.

As this section ends, Jim finds himself in jail for possession. We can infer from the two short entries written while he is incarcerated that he is quite depressed and that he is suffering from withdrawal. He spends a large part of each day huddled in a broom closet, contemplating his life and he has lost interest in writing in his diary. We also learn that his mother refuses to visit him, lending further support to the idea that he has totally alienated himself from his family.

Part 10

Part 10 Summary

Jim is released from Riker's Island after serving only one month thanks to the successful intervention of his school's headmaster. On his first night home, he hangs out at Headquarters and one of his friends gets a syringe ready for him. Jim writes that he almost refuses, but finds it too difficult. He spends the rest of the night on the fire escape simply because there are no bars there to obstruct his view. Jim is glad to put the entire experience behind him. As much as Jim hated the time he spent at Riker's Island, he also knows that it did nothing to help him overcome his addiction.

After months of doing L.S.D., Jim finally has his first bad trip. He was supposed to meet some friends in the park, and when they don't show up; he decides to "go solo." After his second tab, he goes over to the Museum of Modern Art. As he is looking at the various works, it suddenly hits him that he is alone. He momentarily considers going to the hospital, but he can't bear the thought of being left alone in a white room. Instead, he calls a friend who agrees to meet him in five minutes. Impatient and unwilling to wait, Jim makes his way across town and eventually ends up with a friend who nurses him through the remainder of the trip. Jim decides that from this point forward, he is going to stick exclusively with heroin.

Jim is finding it increasingly difficult to buy drugs, a development that has him quite frustrated. He eventually runs into some dealer friends who tell him they can sell him some methadone. Desperate for something to help curtail the withdrawal he is beginning to feel, Jim buys some and drinks it on the spot. Unfortunately, there is only enough methadone to make Jim feel better which is not nearly enough to produce a high. As he returns home, he says he feels no different from any of the other people he passes on the street.

Because he needs support his habit, Jim returns to prostituting himself to other men. In one entry, he describes an encounter that takes place in the men's room of a movie theater and he admits that it turned him on. As the encounter unfolds, Jim says that in the faces of the men watching, he sees people from his past; teachers, coaches, cops who have busted him, and even superintendents from the various apartment buildings he has lived in.

In one entry, Jim contends that despite popular opinion, junkies should be applauded for taking the types of risks they take. He describes three basic types of junkies; those who are casual users, those he refers to as, "Westchester weekend dope heads," and street kids like him who manage to keep their habit under control for two or three years before hitting rock bottom. Jim acknowledges that he has hit rock bottom.

Eager to find a more profitable means of supporting his habit, Jim and some friends attempt to steal cars. Jim has never tried this before but he is confident that he knows



enough to break into the car and hot wire it. It doesn't take long for Jim and his friend to find a Porsche, within minutes they are driving it toward Headquarters. Once there, Jim tells his friend where to park the car while he tries to find someone willing to buy it. He finally makes a connection and they make their way over to the car only to find that his friend had parked it in a no parking zone and it was in the process of being towed away. Jim and his friend realizes that they are not cut out for the car thievery business and they go to the local American Legion Post in the hoping to hustle some money. Instead, they steal some raffle books and sell them in their neighborhood, keeping the proceeds for themselves.

In the following weeks, Jim has his first experience with peyote buttons (a type of "magic mushroom") and has his first hallucination. Not long afterwards, he is sick with a terrible cold that is made worse by his addiction. It is near the end of summer and yet Jim is so cold that he is bundled up in his coat and covered by two blankets. He has terrible stomach cramps and diarrhea. And, realizing that he has to start school in two weeks, he is trying to kick his habit "cold turkey."

Jim's break from drugs lasts only four days. On the fourth day, he shoots a bag of heroin he found in someone's pocket and he feels instantly better. He goes out to the park and mugs a dog walker. While he admits that he doesn't like doing this, it is better than hustling queers. He realizes that sticking a knife against someone's neck to get money is a sign that things have gotten pretty out of control. Jim says that the junkies who resort to this type of money making scheme are usually just as afraid as the people they are mugging.

On another day, Jim and his friend Mancole were having a hard time finding someone to buy from. Getting desperate, they head to Jim's old neighborhood, where he is sure he will find Herbie Hemsle, an old basketball friend to help them out. When they reach the neighborhood, he learns that Herbie is in jail for pushing someone off a roof. Jim realizes that they used to play basketball together only three years ago, and now this guy is in jail for murder. As he hears this news, Jim wonders momentarily where his life is headed. Eventually, the two make their way to Chinatown and after mistaking some fireworks salesmen for drug dealers, they finally find a dealer.

As the diary concludes, Jim is in the midst of a four-day high at Headquarters. He is out of money and out of drugs and he is trying to shake off the effects of his latest episode. He describes one of the dreams he has had in which he was about to be attacked by an alligator. Feeling terrible, he rises from the mattress where he has spent the last four days and makes his way to the bathroom to throw up. As the diary ends, we hear his oft-spoken wish, "I just want to be pure..."

Part 10 Analysis

Aside from the entries that describe his drug use during school hours, we don't read very much about Jim's time in school. Based on what we know, we are given to believe that he is often in trouble. As a result, it is a little difficult to understand why his



headmaster would come to his rescue and convince the judge to let him leave jail early. While it's possible that in spite of his drug use, Jim is a good student who shows particular promise, the more likely scenario is that the headmaster understands that leaving Jim in jail will only plunge him deeper into trouble. Unfortunately, Jim does not recognize his headmaster's faith in him. Jim only appreciates having a way out of jail.

In the previous sections, Jim revealed that he had begun using L.S.D. In this section, we learn that a bad trip has caused him to give up that drug. Jim's bad L.S.D. trip is significant because it marks a turning point in his addiction. Firstly, his bad trip causes him to give up L.S.D. which is significant because it is the first time we have seen Jim exercise some sort of control over his drug usage. Secondly, Jim's bad experience brings to the surface an emotion he has been suppressing, fear of being alone. Indeed, as we think about all that has happened to Jim thus far, there are two common factors; his persistent drug use and the fact that he is always with someone else, either a friend, a girlfriend, or a fellow junkie. This time, he finds himself alone and he realizes that he does not like it. As a result, he makes a vow to give up L.S.D. and returns to using heroin.

Jim recognizes that school is about to begin and that he needs to pull himself together. This is also significant because it tells us that despite his drug addiction, Jim still understands the importance of continuing his education. While he doesn't say so specifically, it is possible that he hopes that by finishing high school and going on to college, he will be able to break free of the environment that seems to have such a tight grip on him.

Unfortunately, any hope we had of Jim turning his life around is short-lived. If anything, his heroin use escalates out of control. Jim says that he is now no different from the other addicts who spend their entire day chasing down their next fix. His decision to mug people in the park tells us just how desperate he has become. And, when he learns that a childhood friend is now in jail for murder, he wonders where his life is headed. This is another instance in which Jim seems to recognize that he is in trouble, but seems powerless to do anything about it.

As the diary entries come to an end, Jim seems to have hit absolute rock bottom but he still hasn't lost sight of his ultimate goal; kicking his habit and becoming "pure." It is obvious that he has a lot of work ahead of him and as the book ends, it is unclear whether or not he will succeed.



Characters

Bobby Blake

Bobby Blake is one of Carroll's junkie friends who gets high and performs ridiculous, illegal acts.

Mr. Bluster

Mr. Bluster is the principal at the Catholic private school Carroll attends on scholarship. Bluster gets Carroll released early from Riker's juvenile prison.

Brian Browning

Brian Browning is one of Carroll's junkie friends and is one of two men who rent the apartment that serves as Headquarters—the local junkie hangout. When Carroll is strung out and needing a heroin fix, Browning goes to get it for him while Jim waits with his older lover. Browning notes that junkies curl up into fetal positions because they are trying to get back to the womb.

Jim Carroll

Carroll is the author and narrator of *The Basketball Diaries*, an autobiographical account of Carroll's coming of age on New York's tough streets. In the first entries, Carroll is a thirteen-year-old who has had limited experience with sex, drugs, and crime. Carroll is also a novice basketball player in his first organized league. All of these aspects of his life change rapidly. He becomes a star basketball player, winning a scholarship to a rich private school. He has many heterosexual experiences and starts using increasingly harder drugs. His heroin addiction starts out small, and he lies to himself about being able to control it. However, as his addiction grows, it changes the quality of every other aspect of his life. He starts committing more crimes, including stealing cars, in order to finance his drug habit. In addition, he makes money by selling his body to homosexuals and older women. As his use of heroin and other drugs grows to include cough syrup, various kinds of pills, methadone, cocaine, and LSD, drugs become the central focus of his life, replacing even his love of basketball. In fact, his massive drug use destroys his dream of playing professional basketball and eventually lands him in juvenile prison. At the end of the diaries, Carroll surfaces from a four-day heroin high and laments about how low he has sunk in life. He says that he only wants to be pure.

Over the course of the diaries, Carroll is exposed to several cultural and political issues. He makes scathing attacks on hypocrisy. He condemns the U.S. use of the communist scare as a justification for building more nuclear weapons and engaging in the Vietnam War. He notes that poor junkies like him do not have the same treatment programs or



escape options as middle-class or rich junkies have. He exposes the hypocrisy of narcotics police, who keep most confiscated drugs for themselves—to sell it on the streets. Ultimately, he predicts the publication of *The Basketball Diaries*, in which he intends to expose these views and facts.

Carroll's Father

Carroll's father is largely absent in the diaries. Even when he and his father talk, the conversation generally ends badly. Carroll is against the Vietnam War, while his father is for it. Also, Carroll wears his hair long like other members of the counterculture, something that bothers his father and his father's friends, who goad Carroll's father into picking fights with his son.

Carroll's Mother

Carroll's mother is largely absent in the diaries. She finds a bag of her son's marijuana, but Carroll fools her into thinking that he does not have a drug problem. When he is in Riker's juvenile prison, she does not come to see him.

Carroll's Older Lover

Carroll describes an affair he has with an older woman, a rich divorcée who makes Carroll engage in bizarre sex acts in exchange for paying for his drug habit. However, when she tries to force a strung-out Carroll to have sex with her, he breaks off the affair.

Marc Clutcher

The junkie Marc Clutcher is one of Carroll's basketball teammates. Along with Carroll and Anton Neutron, Clutcher performs poorly on the team because of his drug use. With others, Clutcher witnesses the woman who tries to commit suicide by jumping out of a window. He also smuggles peyote back from Mexico.

Deborah Duckster

Deborah Duckster, one of Carroll's neighborhood friends, is a model. When Willie gets too drunk one night, he lunges for her, and she kicks him in the groin, knocking him out. Duckster witnesses the woman who tries to commit suicide by jumping out of a window.

Benny Greenbaum

Benny Greenbaum is a homosexual college scout who travels with Carroll's high school team to some games. Greenbaum pays one of the team members to perform oral sex



and gropes Carroll in his hotel room—under the pretense of fitting Carroll for a college uniform.

Lefty

Lefty is Carroll's basketball coach in the Bidly League; Carroll suspects that Lefty is a homosexual, since Lefty gropes his players.

Jimmy Mancole

Jimmy Mancole is one of Carroll's junkie friends. When the police raid Headquarters after a noise complaint, Mancole retaliates against the woman next door, whom he assumes made the complaint. Mancole and Carroll almost get caught shooting up in the park, and then they are swindled by a Mexican drug dealer. Mancole gives Carroll his first heroin shot when Carroll gets out of Riker's and helps Carroll mug people in the park.

Anton Neutron

The junkie Anton Neutron is one of Carroll's basketball teammates. Along with Carroll and Marc Clutcher, Neutron allows drug use to affect his performance on the team.

Willie

The junkie Willie is one of Carroll's old basketball teammates. Willie is the first person who smokes marijuana with Carroll at school. Willie gets so drunk one night that he is rushed to the hospital to get his stomach pumped. Willie gets revenge on an assailant by spiking the person's soda with a dangerously large amount of crystal amphetamine.



Themes

Escape

From a very early age, Carroll tries to escape his tough existence on the streets of New York by pursuing other activities that bring him enjoyment. At thirteen, he begins playing basketball in the Bidy league, his first organized league. Given that he has natural athletic ability, basketball quickly becomes a lifestyle for him, which leads to minor fame and a basketball scholarship to a rich, private school. However, in the process, he also engages in self-destructive activities, such as stealing, drinking, and doing drugs. On one occasion, Carroll and some of his teammates take pills that they think will improve their performance, but the pills do the opposite. Says Carroll: "My legs began to get the feeling someone slit a nice little hole at the top of my thighs and poured in a few gallons of liquid lead." Carroll and his fellow drug-using teammates get kicked out of the game, an occurrence that happens more frequently as Carroll's addiction worsens.

Ultimately, the physical side effects of massive drug use, coupled with Carroll's arrest for drug possession, destroy his dream of playing professional basketball - one of his few chances of escape from his street existence. Carroll notes that street users like him find it hard to escape a heroin addiction; they do not have the support networks or financial means of rich users, who can "take off to the Riviera" if they feel their addictions are getting too strong. Carroll has a conversation with a friend and notes that a junkie on a high often curls up like a fetus. Carroll's friend thinks this is an indication of heroin's power to give junkies a sense that they can escape to the ultimate comfortable, secure place. "That's what it's all about, man, back to the womb."

Addiction

Carroll's heroin habit starts out small, what he calls a "Pepsi-Cola" habit, but his addiction eventually gets out of control - a fact that he recognizes when he tries to stop using heroin and finds that he cannot. He is physically ill from his addiction, but the hardest part is trying to avoid the little voice in his head that keeps telling him to have just one more hit of heroin. "I got to do something to off that little voice, I can gladly take sore muscles but my mind can't handle the monkey back there." Unfortunately, the monkey, the voice of Carroll's addiction, is so strong that he continues his habit. This is so even when he has to use dirty needles to shoot up. He notes a certain needle, stashed in a park, that many local junkies share. Says Carroll, "it's the filthiest spike you ever could see." However, despite this fact, "there is not one bit of hesitation in drawing your shot into that harpoon and shoving it into your mainline." Even unpleasant side effects like vomiting - a side effect of a certain brand of heroin he gets - become part of the experience, and he grows to like it. "I puke four times a day and I love it now. Puking's the newest thing on the junk scene."



Sexuality

Carroll's diaries offer several examples of his potent and varied sexual experiences. When he is around nine years old, he has his first transvestite experience. At thirteen, he gets into the habit of masturbating while watching the stars from the roof of his apartment building. He is excited by "the possibility of being caught in a situation where there is no possibility of explaining yourself." At thirteen, he notes how his coach tends to fondle him and his teammates. "I'm too young to understand about homosexuals but I think Lefty is one." This ignorance does not last long. Carroll initially pursues heterosexual encounters for pleasure and avoids homosexuals. However, once Carroll becomes hooked on heroin, his addiction is so strong that he starts selling his body to homosexuals for drug money. With the exception of one case in the diaries, in which he gets a "strange pleasure [from] . . . this naughty act of perversion for profit," Carroll is disgusted by these encounters.

Also, in the beginning of the diaries, Carroll does not mind getting rid of a drug high to have sex. For example, before he goes to one party, he drinks some codeine cough syrup. However, when he meets a girl there, he perceives "sexual overtones creeping about, so I figured I better go into the bathroom and throw up the medicine to bring me down a bit, in order to get it up a lot." However, as Carroll's heroin addiction gets worse, getting heroin becomes more important than anything else, including sex. On one occasion, Carroll breaks up with his older lover when she tries to initiate sex with him while he is strung out from a heroin withdrawal and waiting for a friend to bring him his fix. "I told her she had no idea how I felt and to just let me lie down and sweat out the wait. Her slightest touch set little stinging grenades off in my head."

Style

Diary

A diary details the events in one's life as a series of periodic entries. *The Basketball Diaries* is composed of ten sections, one for each season—in some cases two seasons—from Fall 1963 to Summer 1966. Each section is composed of five to twenty-six separate entries. Most diaries are kept for personal reasons and are not intended for publication. As a result, the diarist may jump around and discuss many topics, instead of developing one major plot, as other kinds of storytellers do. At first glance, *The Basketball Diaries* appears to follow this episodic format, since each short entry describes a separate event. However, collectively, these entries describe Carroll's coming-of-age transformation—from a healthy, relatively naïve juvenile delinquent into a strung-out, culturally aware, heroin-addicted criminal.

Setting

The events take place in the 1960s in New York City, primarily Manhattan, a small island that contains within its small area some of the world's richest and poorest people. Carroll, a boy from the poor section of New York, is able to use his basketball talent to get into a local, rich private school. He also dates rich young girls, something that he says his friends from the poor part of the city would not believe. "I'm gonna bring all the dirt heads from old Madison Square Boy's Club up here some night: they'll freak out in one second." If he were living in some other U.S. cities, where the physical distance between rich and poor is often greater, it would be harder for him to do this. In addition, New York is notorious for its high crime rate and its drug abusers. In fact, as Carroll notes, his diaries "have the greatest hero a writer needs, this crazy . . . New York." Finally, as the largest American city and one which contained a significant number of landmarks and economic centers, New York—especially Manhattan—was thought to be a prime target for a nuclear warhead during the Cold War, a fear that Carroll expresses on several occasions.

Language

The Basketball Diaries is conspicuous for its graphic profanity. Many entries include at least one profane word, and in some cases, Carroll uses several. These profane words are used to describe sexual acts—in which case he uses many—and are often used for emphasis, even when describing relatively normal events. Carroll also includes a lot of slang—a type of language used in everyday life by common men and women, typically those in the lower or working classes. Slang words are often established words that have been given different meanings. For example, in the English language, a "spade" is a gardening tool. However, in street slang, a spade is an African American. This term is derogatory, which is another common characteristic of slang words. Sex, drugs, and



alcohol are three areas in which slang is often used. For example, Carroll refers to sexual intercourse as "nooky," calls condoms "scumbags," and refers to breasts as "knocks." Marijuana is "weed" or "grass," while heroin is "scag." A "spiller" is someone who acts like he has drunk more than he has, and someone who is drunk is "smashed." These are just some of the countless examples of slang in the book.

Imagery

The imagery in the diaries is also graphic. For example, Carroll and his friends come across a woman who has committed suicide by jumping out of a window. Says Carroll: "I spot a long deep gorge in her ankle and it's oozing blood in slowmotion spurts." Besides violent images, Carroll also uses graphic imagery to describe his sexual experiences. For example, as he is about to say goodbye to his girlfriend before basketball practice one day, he states that she "socks her tongue in my mouth and grinds her sweet bottom up against me." Since Carroll has forgotten to wear a jock strap that day, his resulting erection makes it look "like [he] was shoplifting bananas." Drug imagery is also graphic, particularly the images associated with shooting up heroin. On one occasion, Carroll describes what it looks like when he shoots up: "Just such a pleasure to tie up above that mainline with a woman's silk stocking and hit the mark and watch the blood rise into the dropper like a certain desert lily."



Historical Context

The Cold War

The U.S. use of atomic bombs on Japan ended World War II in 1945, and ushered in the atomic age. After these demonstrations, several countries, including the Soviet Union, rushed to create and test their own atomic bombs. As tensions between the communist Soviet Union and the democratic United States increased, the U.S. government began a policy of backing smaller foreign countries that were in danger of being overthrown by Soviet-backed groups. The resulting tension between the Soviet Union and the United States—and between communism and democracy in general—was labeled the Cold War, and for good reason. Although much of the period was technically spent in peace, the pervasive feeling of suspicion and paranoia that was generated by this clash of superpowers made many feel that they were fighting a war. In the United States, the public was well aware that one mistake on either side could inadvertently trigger World War III. In the diaries, Carroll describes on many occasions what it was like growing up as a "war baby" in a major city during the Cold War, living in constant fear that he was going to die in a nuclear attack:

It's always been the same, growing up in Manhattan. . . . the idea of living within a giant archer's target . . . for use by the bad Russia bowman with the atomic arrows.

Vietnam and the Antiwar Movement

Although the peak years of the Cold War were over by the 1960s, the U.S. fight against communism in foreign countries continued. The United States had been supporting South Vietnam for decades in its conflict against Ho Chi Minh's communist forces in North Vietnam. Most Americans were unaware of this involvement, since U.S. soldiers in Vietnam were disguised as advisors. However, in 1965, the United States escalated its involvement, adding fifty thousand new ground troops to the twenty-three thousand already stationed in Vietnam. At this point, the U.S. public was more informed about what was going on, and a massive antiwar movement began. Many people, like Carroll, were forced to take a side in this conflict.

The Counterculture in the 1960s

Carroll, like many other members of the counterculture—a group of people who rebelled against the U.S. capitalist establishment—was against the war. The counterculture grew as many people, especially American youth, became hippies or junkies. Hippies wore their hair long, dressed in deliberately shabby clothes, and believed in nonviolent forms of antiwar protest such as sit-ins and peace marches. Hippies tended to use recreational drugs, particularly marijuana and LSD; they believed these drugs freed their minds and gave them better understanding about the human condition. Junkies shared many characteristics with hippies, however, junkies like



Carroll were mainly interested in getting high, and were not opposed to violence and crime. In fact, as Martin Gilbert notes in his book, *A History of the Twentieth Century, Volume Three: 1952-1999*: "The need to supply and finance the drug habit, if necessary by theft and violence, undermined the moral outlook of many individuals."

Critical Overview

By the time *The Basketball Diaries* was published in a limited-edition book in 1978, and again in wider distribution in 1980, it was already a hit with underground readers. Literary critics soon followed suit. Many of them, such as Jamie James in his 1980 review of the book for *American Book Review*, discuss the gritty nature of the book. As James notes, it is "a blow-by-blow account of a season in Hell." James, like many other critics, was impressed by the literary skill of the young Carroll. Says James of the book, it "is a literary miracle; a description of the formation of an artistic sensibility written by the artist, not in retrospect, but in the process." Several other critics also note Carroll's talent. Says Barbara Graustark of Carroll in her 1980 review of the book for *Newsweek*: "His terse wit, with its archly contrived naivete, transformed a tale of teen-age rebellion into a contemporary classic."

The Basketball Diaries received additional notice when the Jim Carroll Band released its first album, *Catholic Boy*, in 1980. The album's lyrics were rough and dark, like his diaries, and several music critics commented on the book in the course of reviewing the album. In his 1981 review of the album for *Stereo Review Magazine*, Steven Simels calls the book "a scary, mordantly funny odyssey along the dark underbelly of the Sixties, a virtuoso performance that ought to be must reading for those who still tend to romanticize the counterculture."

The Basketball Diaries also received favorable critical attention in 1987, when it was reprinted to coincide with the publication of its sequel, *Forced Entries*. The same was true in 1995, when the book was reprinted to coincide with the film adaptation of the book. This time around, with the help of a tie-in cover featuring actor Leonardo DiCaprio, the book landed on the bestseller list. Some critics, like Lewis MacAdams in his 1995 profile of Carroll for *Entertainment Weekly*, praised the book again. MacAdams notes "the miracle of Jim Carroll," a boy who "wrote like an angel, creating a transcendent autobiography." Others, like Wayne Jebian, in his review of the book for the *Columbia Journal of American Studies*, note how the book's graphic language did not turn off many readers, as one suspected it might. Says Jebian: "Words that might bore or disgust if spouted by a dirty old man sitting on your couch instead shock and amaze when uttered by a tender-aged youth in a pre-political correctness era." For Cassie Carter, the graphic quality of Carroll's life is what leads to his genius and his literary success. In her 1996 article for *Dionysos: Literature and Addiction Quarterly*, Carter notes that *The Basketball Diaries* "performs an amazing feat of alchemy, transforming the waste of Carroll's adolescence into a victory."

Still, despite its legendary status with both reviewers and popular readers, the book is not without its critics. Most of the negative criticism has centered on the book's graphic depictions of sex, violence, and drug use, and the book has been banned in certain areas as a result. In addition, in 1997, following Michael Carneal's killing spree in West Paducah, Kentucky, the film version of *The Basketball Diaries* came under fire. Carneal claimed that a scene depicting one of Carroll's classroom-shooting fantasies from the book had encouraged him to kill his classmates.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4



Critical Essay #1

Poquette has a bachelor's degree in English and specializes in writing about literature. In the following essay, Poquette discusses Carroll's use of extremes in The Basketball Diaries.

Jim Carroll fills his autobiographical diaries with graphic language and imagery and includes situations that take the reader from one extreme emotion to another. Says Jamie James, in his 1980 review of the book for *American Book Review*, "When it is funny it is hilarious, reminiscent of Lenny Bruce at his best. When it hits a blue note, it is harrowing."

An example of a hilarious incident is Carroll's observation of the melodrama during a going-away party for Gums, a local military recruit. Gums's family makes a big fuss about his potentially dangerous involvement in the Vietnam War, but Carroll finds out that the boy is really only going to serve six months in a local reserve unit. As Carroll notes, "from the scene here you'd think old Gums had to assassinate Chairman Mao with a water pistol." On another occasion, Carroll talks about a kleptomaniac friend, Bobby Blake, who gets high, breaks into a closed ice cream parlor to steal the cash register, and ends up making himself an ice cream soda instead. He is still drinking it when two police arrive, "not believing for sure anything they see, Bobby not budging but biting away, cash register wrecked on the floor and the grilled cheese sandwich which Bobby forgot about burning to a crisp."

Carroll also describes some extremely gut-wrenching episodes, such as the various sex acts he has to engage in to support his drug habit, which lately have involved "handcuffs, masks, snakes (yeah, that's right, real ones), chains, whips, last week a guy had a pet parrot that he had eat grapes out of my pubic hair." One of his heterosexual encounters leads to getting a case of gonorrhea, which he describes in excruciating detail: "it's quite a bringdown waking up with your underwear a mass of red-brown blotches, all stiff as cardboard except where the gooey fresh blobs are." Some of the most harrowing descriptions in the diaries are associated with Carroll's heroin use. When he resurfaces after a four-day high, he notices two sets of needles next to him "in the slightly bloody water in the plastic cup on the crusty linoleum, probably used by every case of hepatitis in upper Manhattan by now." When Carroll goes through heroin withdrawal, his descriptions get even more disturbing. On one occasion when he is strung out, he waits the hour that it will take for a dose of methadone - a slower-acting drug - to take effect. "You bet that's a long hour too, with them cold flashes shooting up from your crotch right out your skull and your muscles feeling like wood and your energy to a sad eyed drip."

Besides the funny or disturbing descriptions, the situations themselves are often extreme. Even ordinary situations, like the many basketball games that Carroll plays, fall into one of two extremes - he either plays well or he takes drugs and plays horribly. In the beginning of the diaries, Carroll is a basketball star. The diaries are filled with several accounts of Carroll and his team dominating lesser teams. For example, at one



point, Carroll's team is shorthanded while playing another team, but "it was the lamest bunch of saps ever put on a court, this other team, and we wiped them out by at least forty points." On another occasion, Carroll's team is "ahead by 23 points" by the end of the first four minutes of the game. As for Carroll himself, he easily impresses girls at his games. For example, he describes one game, during which the girls in the stands open their legs wider and wider as they let out "oohs" and "ahhs" to show their amazement at Carroll's athletic ability. This phenomenon increases "in direct proportion to each 'ooh' that by the time I dunked one backwards I could almost distinguish what color panties each chick sitting there was wearing."

At the other extreme, Carroll plays badly in games in which he takes drugs, such as when he takes some pills that he mistakenly thinks will make him faster. In reality, they drag him down. "The other team's dude who I normally leave looking at my shoelaces sailed over me and easily laid it in." Later in the diaries, Carroll notes that the massive drug habits of his and two of his teammates are affecting the team's performance. "It is common knowledge around the entire school that Marc Clutcher, Anton Neutron and myself are f-ing up our basketball team by taking every drug we can get our hands on before games."

Carroll's experiences with drugs are also extreme. At thirteen, Carroll is sniffing cleaning fluid. On another occasion, he is able to drink an enormous amount - two bottles - of codeine cough syrup before a party. When he first starts using heroin, he mainlines it, meaning that he injects it directly into a vein as opposed to injecting it into his skin or sniffing the dry powder. Novice heroin users usually avoid mainlining, since the high is so strong and it is easier to overdose. Says Carroll, "Tony said I might as well skin pop it. I said OK. Then Pudgy says, 'Well, if you're gonna put a needle in, you might as well mainline it.'" On another occasion, Carroll's friend, Willie, was beaten up by mistake; the attackers try to make up with Willie by letting him wash his bloody mouth out with soda. "Willie took one sip of the soda, slipped in (and this is true) 200 mgs. of pure crystal amphetamine, and gave it back to the prick, who drank the rest."

Carroll's deliberate statement that this incident is true highlights its extreme nature. In fact, after another extreme episode, Carroll notes: "You probably figure I made this one up, but I swear every word is true." In fact, the many outrageous episodes in the book have caused some critics to question its authenticity. In his 1981 review for *Creem*, Richard Riegel calls *The Basketball Diaries* "a disturbingly seamless mixture of fact and fiction." Likewise, in his 1987 *New York Times* review of *The Basketball Diaries* and its sequel, *Forced Entries*, Christopher Lehmann-Haupt notes that *The Basketball Diaries* was "filled with a kind of vitality, though clearly exaggerated in its boastful accounts of drinking, drugs, sex and every sort of crime from stealing cars to hustling homosexuals in Times Square." As James notes, "It suffers from all the faults of the genre," including the fact that "some of the stories sound made up." However, as Peter Delacorte notes of *The Basketball Diaries* in his 1987 *San Francisco Chronicle* review of *Forced Entries*, ultimately, the speculation over the work's authenticity does not matter. Says Delacorte: "Of course, from the author's point of view the reader's confusion on such a point is absolutely irrelevant, as long as the reader stays interested."



In fact, Carroll himself is aware that normal situations make uninteresting diaries. At the end of one of the rare entries that does not include an outrageous situation, Carroll notes that this particular entry is boring. "I just couldn't think of anything else to write about anyway, no dope, no nooky, no queers following me today, I guess you start writing lame diaries like this." With this statement, Carroll hits on a well-known belief. Most people's lives are not that interesting. Despite the popular demand for biographies of interesting people, on a day-to-day basis most people - even celebrities - lead normal, and even boring, lives. Not Carroll, however. In his life, as depicted by *The Basketball Diaries*, there little boredom; readers are treated to a continuous, exciting variety of extreme dialogue, imagery, situations, and characters.

However, in the end, the diaries are true, even if Carroll did make some of it up. They offer an accurate reflection of what life was like for kids like Carroll, growing up on the tough streets of New York in the 1960s. At one point in his diaries, Carroll says that most people are unaware of what life is like in the city. He says that he will soon let people "know what's really going down in the blind alley out there in the pretty streets with double garages. I got a tap on all your wires, folks. I'm just really a wise ass kid getting wiser." Carroll's main purpose in writing his diaries is not to provide a completely accurate account of his own life but to represent his life and the lives of all those like him. His is the voice of criminals, junkies, prostitutes, and other urban characters who, like him, have struggled against their disadvantaged surroundings and who have failed to "become pure."

Source: Ryan D. Poquette, Critical Essay on *The Basketball Diaries*, in *Nonfiction Classics for Students*, Gale, 2003.



Critical Essay #2

France holds an M.S.L.S. from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a Ph.D. in history from Temple University. He is a librarian, college counselor, and teacher at University Liggett School and teaches writing at Macomb Community College near Detroit, Michigan. In the following essay, France discusses both historical context and the tradition of the poet as rebel in *The Basketball Diaries*.

The primary value of Jim Carroll's *The Basketball Diaries* is its contextual vision of time (from the fall of 1963 to the summer of 1966) and place (New York City and its environs) and its carrying onward of a dramatic cultural strand that presents the (in this case young) artist as incorrigible rebel. The importance of the historical content highlighted in the published text is heightened by comparison with the financially successful movie adaptation, starring actor Leonardo Di Caprio that was released in 1995. In the latter version, all references to the 1960s are excised; the setting in the movie version is still New York City, but it is a very different, much more affluent and much more apolitical version of the city apparently of early- to mid-1990s vintage. Indeed, even though the movie quotes extensively from the printed version, it loses much of the charm and background tension and interest rendered in the book. The original diarist makes much of the atomic jitters caused by the Cold War, the Vietnam War, and ferment caused by class and racial friction, indirectly (and at times directly) using his and societal fears as justifications for his rebellious attitude, drug-use, and generally antisocial, at times violently sociopathic behavior.

In his "Author's Note" to *Forced Entries: The Downtown Diaries, 1971-1973*, Jim Carroll writes: "This diary is not the literal truth and is not meant to be a historical recounting of the period. The entries were consciously embellished and fictionalized to some extent. My purpose was simply to convey the texture of my experience and feelings for that period." The same probably holds true for *The Basketball Diaries*. What the reader can gain from the early diaries is a sense of what life was like in New York City during a three-year period for a precocious adolescent and teenager who was a good basketball player, drug addict, and neophyte poet. From his wry observations, often dangerous preoccupation and conflicts, one can also learn much about attitudes that oppose his, the prevailing norms, and generally what was going on culturally. Simply put, Jim Carroll's rebelliousness tapped into a relatively small but growing societal discontent that was building momentum for the entire duration of that historical period.

One of Jim Carroll's heroes throughout the diaries is singer-songwriter Bob Dylan, an important cultural rebel and icon of the period and ever since. A Summer 64 diary entry observes: "I spent most of the time just drinking beer in the corner and listening to Dylan on the jukebox." At a time when bands such as the Rolling Stones and the Beatles were spearheading the famous musical upheaval dubbed the British Invasion, Carroll chose to focus most of his musical attention on Minnesota-born, New York veteran Bob Dylan (he mentions charismatic soul singer James Brown in one incident). This makes perfect sense in that Dylan defined himself as rebel-poet, the very thing Jim Carroll wanted to become in full. Bob Dylan could fuse the power and possibilities of poetry with music,



passionately rail against the things in society he didn't like, and become rich and famous all at the same time. Technically, he couldn't even sing very well, an evident fact that inspired all sorts of aspiring poets and singers. Indeed, Jim Carroll himself eventually (in the late 1970s) formed a rock band and sang his own poems and lyrics just like his hero, including "People Who Died," a very memorable song on the album *Catholic Boy* that chronicles the deaths of friends and acquaintances, many of whom appear and whose deaths are mentioned or similarly described in entries of *The Basketball Diaries*. This song also appears in the movie version, tying four art forms (written diary, poetry, music, and cinema) together. Carroll's interest in Bob Dylan persists throughout *The Basketball Diaries*. It is worth noting that Carroll's voice has an imprint that is almost equally affected and unique as Dylan's. For Carroll as a boy, as with heroin, once hooked, it would have been difficult to avoid his interest in Dylan, for during the approximate period covered by the diaries, Dylan released no fewer than six very influential albums; indeed, halfway through the period he caused a ruckus among folk music "purists" by changing from acoustic to electric guitar. Carroll, in a Winter 1966 entry, describing an incident shooting up heroin, notes: "Bob Dylan, he's in the radio. He glows in the dark and my fingers are just light feathers falling and fading down. . ." Carroll was sensitive enough to discover that Dylan did not and does not carry his appeal to everyone, in one case to an African-American friend. In the spring of 1966, after the electric album *Highway 61 Revisited* had climbed the predominantly white popular music charts, Carroll noted in his diary: "I tell my friend play Dylan . . . 'Who he?'"

The Basketball Diaries also taps into one of Bob Dylan's major literary influences, the Beat Generation. This loosely defined group of poets and writers included novelist Jack Kerouac, author of *On the Road* (1957), poet Allen Ginsberg, author of "Howl" (1956), and writer William S. Burroughs. Carroll does not inform the reader whether these are important influences on him at the time as well, but their impact and his meetings with some of the Beat figures is definitively mentioned in *Forced Entries: The Downtown Diaries, 1971-1973*. As with his fondness for Dylan, this again make sense, for Carroll shares many of the same values and interests as the Beats. In fact, Carroll's preoccupation with drug addictions, especially with heroin, parallels Burroughs' recounting of his own addictions in the memoir, *Junky*. All three of these key Beat Generation figures spent formative college years in New York City during the World War II barely twenty years before the events and musings of *The Basketball Diaries*, so he shared the same geographical space, the same sense of rebelliousness, a common exposure to drugs, numerous (including sometimes bizarre) sexual encounters, and at times criminal behavior. With Ginsberg he shared a love of poetry and a sense that prevailing society must be questioned and challenged because of its at best apathetic and at worst reactionary politics. They all enjoyed bucking the status quo, a hallmark of and now a stereotyped way of viewing the 1960s.

In *The Basketball Diaries*, Jim Carroll frequently argues with his father over societal and political issues that raged during the period. In the movie version, it is worth noting, Carroll's father is edited out along with the 1960s. Carroll's father, in the book version, sides with the status quo along with most of white Americans at the time: to show one's patriotism, one should trust and not criticize the government or religious institutions. But



Jim Carroll distrusted, and he criticized vociferously. Like Dylan and Ginsberg, he had specific reasons to feel distrust and anxiety and to show opposition. One was fear of incineration by nuclear weapons as a by-product of the Cold War between the Americans and the Soviet bloc. Just prior to the period covered by *The Basketball Diaries*, a third world war had nearly broken out during the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962); not mentioned but clearly felt by Carroll and most New Yorkers at the time, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963; and in 1964 United States began escalating its involvement in the Vietnam War (1964-1972). Intermittently throughout *The Basketball Diaries* Carroll addresses his pervasive fear of nuclear holocaust. He describes feelings of being stuck at "ground zero in one fireball Island" in a Summer 65 diary entry devoted to atomic jitters and the psychic trauma it inflicts. "After all these years of worry and nightmares over it," the entry continues, "(I remember my brother enticing me on to panic during the Cuban crisis saying they were coming any minute) I think by now I'd feel very left out if they dropped the bomb and it didn't get me." When a power outage shut down much of New York City and the east coast in the fall of 1965, Carroll was caught in a subway train and thought the end had come, later noting to his diary, "the fact there were no tunnel lights on either made for more A-bomb paranoia." Carroll's diaries also intermittently mention his dread of Vietnam, for after high school he might be drafted into military service there, mixed with the recurrent fear of nuclear war. In a Winter 1966 diary entry, things have gotten so bad that he thinks of his whole life as a reprieve from the inevitable. "It's just gotten bigger now . . . will I have time to finish the poems breaking loose in my head? Time to find out if I'm the writer I know I can be? How about these diaries? Or will Vietnam beat me to the button? Because it's poetry now . . . and the button is still there, waiting . . ."

The movie version of *The Basketball Diaries* was made and released in a rare bubble of time. The Cold War had ended, and so had some of the decades-old fears of nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union. The American economy boomed at the time, so there probably seemed no reason to set the film back during the tumultuous 1960s. At the time, who would have cared? The relevance and acuteness of Jim Carroll's awareness and fears of New York City as a target of sudden attack feels far more visceral and immediate since the events of September 11, 2001, a sad and tragic fact that nonetheless helps the text version of *The Basketball Diaries* to resonate again in time and place, both as a recapturing of the past and prophesying for the future. Artists and poets may seem paranoid at times, but this does not mean that something like what they fear does not sometimes really come to pass.

Source: Erik France, Critical Essay on *The Basketball Diaries*, in *Nonfiction Classics for Students*, Gale, 2003.



Critical Essay #3

Dupler has published numerous essays and has taught college English. In this essay, Dupler analyzes the destructive rift between an adolescent young man and the adult society around him.

A picaresque novel differs from a conventional novel in that the picaresque form usually revolves around a main character who travels loosely from scene to scene, encountering other characters and situations in a random fashion, gathering whatever seeds of wisdom that present themselves. The conventional novel, on the other hand, typically involves characters whose actions and conflicts form a plot, which leads to some sort of resolution in the end. Miguel de Cervantes's (1547-1616) *Don Quixote* was the original picaresque novel, from which a long tradition of storytelling has evolved. Don Quixote was a knight whose travels have been viewed by critics as a spiritual quest, a journey undertaken for self-knowledge. The main character in *The Basketball Diaries* might be considered, in a stretch, a modern-day teenage knight, whose battles are on the basketball courts and on the streets, and who also is on a quest, when he states that he just wants "to be pure." But this is the only similarity between these distant stories that somewhat share a form. Knights in Don Quixote's day had very strict societal codes of conduct (chivalry), while the main character in this book is an unformed young man who is either lacking in reliable codes of conduct, or whose main mission seems to be to challenge and test codes and ethics.

Carroll portrays his main character and his street-wise life with a palette of decadence. The protagonist's reality is a downward spiral of drug abuse, theft, violence, altercations with police and other authority figures, sexual abuse, and prostitution, often described with crude and profane language. Indeed, the repetition of these sordid scenes and the protagonist's capacity for self-destruction and wayward behavior would be tiresome if not for the Tom Sawyer-ish charm the protagonist manages to maintain throughout the story. The reader can be attracted to this character despite his trouble-making and his tough-guy posturing because the story plays upon sympathy; the reader knows that this young man has been dealt a harsh reality by fate, lacking in teachers, mentors, and caring parents. The young man, as evidenced by his striving on the basketball courts, also wants to rise above it all and occasionally does, and records these efforts poetically and intelligently at times. The reader feels for him when the protagonist becomes mired in addiction and the troubles of street life.

The protagonist of *The Basketball Diaries* is curiously without any deep relationships throughout the story. His friends of his own age are partners in petty crime, but none of these adolescents are described with any conviction and remain vague for the reader. No characters in the protagonist's life are memorable and these characters only briefly appear and disappear in the narrative. The protagonist does not even give his own name; perhaps the author wants the reader to believe that it actually is a diary. A policeman refers to the main character as "Jim," keeping with the diary form. However, this omission of a proper name also has the effect of making the protagonist seem young, unformed, and very isolated; the story is told from a vague first-person



perspective. The protagonist comments on his isolation when he describes a feeling he has while standing on a rooftop, looking down at the city: "It's just me and my own naked self and the stars breathing down. And it's beautiful." This is a revealing scene; the young man wants to soar above the troubles of the street, but he can only do so by himself, as other people seem so dangerous and distant to him. At the same time, he discloses later in his narrative that it is not really beautiful to be isolated; he has a dream in which he longs for "an incredible love somewhere in my world," and near the end of the story, he has a horrifying drug experience in which he realizes, with emphasis, that "I AM ALONE." His isolation ends in increasing self-destruction and addiction without anyone to help him.

Of all the brief relationships described in the narrative, the protagonist's relationship with authority might go the deepest in giving insights into his character and his troubles. Like Tom Sawyer, he finds the adult world alien and to be avoided. Adults in these diary entries have few redeeming features and give reasons for profound distrust. On the first page of the book, the basketball coach (a classic mentor figure for young people) is revealed with undertones of potential sexual abuse, and later in the book priests, teachers, and a basketball scout are all portrayed as sexual predators. Adults are also shown as helpless addicts, such as the alcoholics that single out the protagonist on trains, or as desperate prostitutes. The protagonist sees a woman commit suicide as though it is a common occurrence in the adult world, and he can only turn to heroin to dull his shock. The protagonist and his friends are in a constant struggle with police, the symbol of society's authority. However, these authorities are also untrustworthy; a policeman, for instance, unjustly strikes the protagonist. When the protagonist's basketball talents gain him a scholarship to a prestigious school, he recoils against the school and remarks, "I feel like . . . blowing up the 257 years of fine tradition of this place."

Tradition is not the only thing the protagonist wants to blow up. He is alarmed by the violent thoughts that fill his mind; he sits in class and fantasizes about taking "a machine gun and . . . firing like mad" to "release some tension." It seems that there are areas in this young man's psyche that haunt him and that he is unable to confront, and he has no trustworthy adults who can guide him to deeper self-knowledge, or with whom he can even share his troubles.

The protagonist's parents are no help to him. His father accosts him with anger, and the young man describes that relationship as "an unending rift." At one point the young man swears on his "mom's grave," then quickly notes that his mother is not really dead, although she only pops up in his narrative when she finds drugs and lectures him on the matter, or when she unreasonably attacks his beliefs. He describes his home as "a screaming maniac nut house," and hints that his parents are angry racists, although at the same time he clearly needs his parents' love. He tries to escape his family strife through heroin, writing how his "veins are sore," yet he still loves his parents "somehow more" through the pain and addiction. Near the end of the diaries, when he is in a juvenile reformatory and his mother refuses to visit him, he wishes he has godparents.



The narrator does give hints that he may recognize that he has a problem with authority, and perhaps justifiably so. This is a young man who lives in a period and culture haunted by war; in his fantasies of violence, he dreams of fighting the Germans of World War II. He describes his boss at Yankee Stadium as a man who could be a "commander in any of Hitler's war camps." Furthermore, the Cold War atmosphere in which he exists haunts him deeply. Several times he notes his fear of a nuclear bombing, remarking on his "A-bomb paranoia" and the specter of the "Russians" with their "atomic arrows." He describes his state of mind as "hideous fear" brought on by "constant drills in schools and TV flashes." His fear and fatalism concerning nuclear annihilation have been with him for so long that he says, "I'd feel very left out if they dropped the bomb and it didn't get me."

The political atmosphere in which the protagonist lives gives him a sense of hopelessness and powerlessness. For instance, when his school arranges a traditional Thanksgiving fast to support the poor and hungry, the protagonist can not believe that such a gesture could be beneficial and calls it a "farce." At a peace march, he comments, "Who needs leaders?" He concludes that violence is a better means to solve problems than peaceful demonstration, and there are no wise people or leaders present who can guide him and share ideas. At the same time, the protagonist is sensitive enough to ask a little girl if "Christ would fight in the war?" Rather than finding a meaningful way to express and sort out his beliefs, the protagonist turns again to drugs and denial, so that he will not feel "guilty about not fighting a war" and as a means to escape the "scheming governments of death."

Finally, as meaningful relationships with other people and with authority figures are lacking in these diaries, the protagonist develops his addictive relationship with drugs. In the beginning of the story, the reader is told about the young man's first heroin experience, as well as his experiences with marijuana and psychedelic substances. At first, the protagonist seems to approach drugs with a sense of adventure, recalling the French poet Rimbaud's (1854-1891) famous quote that a poet must use any means available to cause a 'derangement of the senses,' in order to enhance poetic and visionary experience. However, when the reader becomes familiar with the young man's pains and troubles, it becomes clear that his drug experiences are far from positive and visionary. A flirtation with drugs leads to destructive addiction. Although the narrator describes an experience with the Native-American ritual plant peyote as "incredible," the reader still grasps the escapist motive when the young man writes that his mind went "somewhere" the "bald headed generals and wheelchair senators could never imagine." Unlike the Native-American vision-seekers, who have had organized rituals and elder guides for excursions into their experimental realms, the protagonist only has a casual friend to accompany him. His experience becomes one of escape from the world and from his own society's elders, with no life-changing wisdom or visions following it.

In the end, the protagonist of *The Basketball Diaries* uses drug addiction to fill the void created by a lack of positive authority and genuine mentors. The young man, although once a star on the basketball court, cannot shine by himself in the world. In his final diary entries, he goes through cycles of addiction and withdrawal, and seems to hope that the police catch him, a desperate plea for attention from authority. He blames



impersonal "big business" men and "white haired old men in smoking jacket armchairs" for the troubles in the world. In his last diary entry, he describes "four days of temporary death." Lacking any true adult guides in life, and too young and inexperienced to guide himself, he remains an unformed "fetus" longing to go "back to the womb," rather than a young man with great potential springing forward into the adult world.

Source: Douglas Dupler, Critical Essay on *The Basketball Diaries*, in *Nonfiction Classics for Students*, Gale, 2003.



Critical Essay #4

In the following interview-essay, Williams offers background on Carroll's life and career with comments from Carroll on the occasion of the film release of The Basketball Diaries.

"I could get my shooting eye back," says Jim Carroll in a voice from the Borough of Lost Souls. "But that first step, man, that's the first thing to go." Carroll, at 44, still has the wounded-fawn cheekbones and red hair of the immortal adolescent. Thirty years ago, he was already a god in his small New York universe, a basketball star, literary prodigy, and fledgling heroin addict. That boy has been mummified in celluloid in the film version of his memoir, *The Basketball Diaries*, with Leonardo Di Caprio playing the stoned angel in a blazer and rep tie.

The actual Jim sits today in a Madison Avenue coffee shop, over rice pudding and apple-cinnamon tea, and looks back on his glory days with toneless eyes of battleship gray, eyes that look like they have seen three lifetimes.

"I was always such a f-n' gunner," he says. "Y'know, if they had a three-point line back then, I woulda scored, like, seven more points a game. But see, I wasn't a natural one-step leaper. I didn't have spring. But I worked really hard with, like, weighted spats and stuff. So by my sophomore year, I could dunk a ball, like, backwards, take off from the foul line. After a while, they'd have a guy just sitting there for me. Y'know?"

That was in 1966. Carroll was an all-city guard for Trinity, sparring with legends like Vaughan Harper - the Felipe Lopez of his day - and "the Goat," Earl Manigault, on the playgrounds of Harlem. By night, he was traversing the city in a hormonal search for significance, pulling off wild stunts and minor crimes with pals like Pedro and Herbie, and using his basketball-star status to score with girls from Park Avenue to the Grand Concourse. And, amazingly, he was getting it all down on paper. Jack Kerouac said that at 13, he wrote better prose than 89 percent of the novelists in America ("I'm so sick of that f-n' quote, man," says Carroll). It was a world without gravity.

Carroll is on his second coffee shop and it's only 10 A.M. He's just met with a few friends from Drugs Anonymous and is stopping off before continuing an epic walk to the Fifth Avenue office of his lawyer, ex-wife, and friend Rosemary Carroll. A few minutes ago, he was walking down Lexington Avenue when a guy in Chuck Taylors, maybe 25, stalked him for a block before interrupting, reverentially: "You're Jim Carroll! I just heard this voice. . . ."

"It's, like, I call up stores, and the person on the other end of the line says, '*Is this Jim Carroll?*'" Carroll says in his characteristic pinched whine, equal parts Edith Bunker and William Burroughs.

He wears a denim work shirt, blue watch cap, and black sunglasses. Flecks of gray have pushed into his thin, incongruous beard. Tiny folds of skin gather under the eyes,



though no one can see past his black-framed sunglasses. And he's talking incessantly, allowing each story the freedom to ramble.

Carroll is talking ball again, wagging his wrist in a dribble motion. "So it was the day we were auditioning Patrick [McGaw], who plays Neutron in the film, and they were short a guy for three-on-three. It was freezing, y'know, down on Thompson Street, with ice all over the side of the court, like where your hands get all cracked, like, when you're a kid, playin' outdoors in winter? It was me and Marky [Wahlberg] and James Madio versus Patrick, Leo [Di Caprio], and Bryan [Goluboff], the screenwriter. And *I was pa-thet-ic*. I go up for this little jump shot, with Leo guarding me, and he's got no leaps at all, and he comes in and *blocks my shot!*" He shakes his head. "I hate them for making me do that."

"That's the thing about this project, the biggest downer," Carroll says. "I had that moment. I'm not going back to try to recapture it. I had that one chance. . . ."

A world without gravity. Twenty-five years ago, *The Paris Review* published his teenage diaries over his strong reservations; he saw himself as a poet. But the diaries themselves are poetry of a sort: *He's down dealing on the hottest corner in the city, like a furnace that street, can feel narco heat waves through your sneakers.*

"I think they saw the diaries in *The World* magazine, published by the Poetry Project. They told me Plimpton wanted to see them," Carroll says. He says that Truman Capote's editor at Random House, Joe Fox, wanted to publish the diaries as a book, but Carroll was adamant about doing a poetry collection. He finally sold the rights to Bantam in 1979, insisting on paperbacks only. "It was the perfect book for the time, the punk scene, but I thought it would be out-to-lunch to publish it as this \$19.95 hardcover." Carroll estimates the book has sold around 500,000 copies, and Bantam did a study that showed six people read it for every one who bought it.

The Basketball Diaries, which Carroll wrote between the ages of 13 and 15, is a panorama of winos, preppies, hustlers, and fools. It's New York picaresque - *Oliver Twist* with a habit. Carroll published poems in *Poetry* when he was still shooting jumpers against Riverdale High. In the seventies and early eighties, he played rock and roll and almost made it big.

Now, with the arrival of the long-awaited film, comes Carroll's unsolicited midlife retrospective. Carroll sighs, a little weary: "With the records and everything, I've *had* my time above-ground. Y'know?"

Jim Carroll was an idea fifteen years in the making for his parents, Tom and Agnes Carroll. They had tried to have kids well before Tom's wartime tours of Iwo Jima and Saipan. They'd given up when Thomas Joseph Jr. was born in 1949; James Dennis ("from Dionysius") followed a year later.

Carroll spent his early years in the East Twenties, a tough neighborhood at the time; at 13, his family moved to the more middle-class Irish enclave of Inwood in upper Manhattan. That was the first year he shot up. "I think the main reason I started using



heroin was that everyone else was always going out drinking, and I hated drinking," he says innocently. He hated Catholic school, though, and as a freshman used basketball and good grades as a ticket to the affluent Trinity School on the Upper West Side.

His father was a hard-assed war vet whose own father had run a Harlem speakeasy for Dutch Schultz. "My old man would listen to the music I was playing, Phil Ochs, and say, 'What the f- is this *Phil Ouches* guy? What is this goddamned Communist s-t I'm hearing?'" Carroll says. "Y'know, his bar was this real cops-and-construction-workers redneck bar, and he'd have to listen to them go, 'What the hell is with your son with his long hair? You know, I used to read about him in the sports pages, scored 40 points; now he's got hair down to here.' And then Smitty, the postman from our building, the loudmouthed bastard, starts saying, y'know, 'Your son gets all this poetry stuff in the mail; I mean, what in the hell is that?' Because that's the take in any neighborhood, in the Jimmy Breslin sense. Poetry is sissy stuff. Anybody who writes poetry is a fag." Carroll laughs. "Which I found out is absolutely true when I got out on the scene."

By the time he was a junior in high school, Carroll was traveling down to open poetry readings at St. Mark's Church, swallowing his fear, and turning heads. He impressed poet Ted Berrigun as well as influential literary editors.

He tried college, attending Wagner in Staten Island "for a year, as far as the draft was concerned." He adds, with disbelief, "My dorm roommates, like, they thought the biggest thrill was to go down and see the Johnny Carson show." He was gone within weeks, and spent even less time at his next school, Columbia.

In 1973, Carroll published his first poetry collection, *Living at the Movies*, and moved to San Francisco with a girlfriend and his methadone. From there it was up the coast to the art colony of Bolinas, where he met Rosemary. "I learned to like being by myself. Maybe too much. But that was the first time I discovered a writing routine." He might have stayed on that path had it not been for a night in San Diego in 1978. Jim was hanging out with Patti Smith, an old girlfriend, before a gig. There was a scuffle involving roadies, and Smith booted the opening act from the bill. In a pinch, she suggested Jim open the show, just get up and speak-sing some poems, as he had done for her before. Her band would back him, just riff. "I was like, 'Uhhh . . .'" says Carroll, eyes wide with mock terror. "I didn't even like rock and roll that much." The gig lasted seven minutes. But the Jim Carroll Band was born.

"When I came back to New York, it was such a joke, because I was always referred to as the pure young poet who wasn't in it for what he could get out of it; and all of a sudden, the pure young poet comes back, and I've got this deal for the paperback of *The Basketball Diaries*, and I'm *hanging out with the Rolling Stones*."

The single "People Who Died" was his rock-and-roll master work, a Ramones-style guitar grind molded around a terse catalog of the victims he knew in his New York adolescence. "There was that line, *G-berg and Georgie let the gimmicks, go rotten/died of hepatitis in upper Manhattan*. It was actually five of us that shared that needle, and three of us died from it. I just say 'G-berg and Georgie' because of the scan," he says.



"G-berg, yeah, like Goldberg. The guy's name wasn't Goldberg; he was a Puerto Rican guy, but everyone said he looked Jewish."

Carroll's album *Catholic Boy*, which came out in 1980, put him on the commercial radar. Within two years, Carroll's group was opening for the J. Geils Band in hockey arenas. "There were always these girls pushing to the front to sock their tongues into your mouth," he recalls.

The fact that the next two records didn't move was no great tragedy. "These guys were always saying, 'The minute you get onstage, it's great, no matter how much you're hurting.' But that didn't work for me. There were some nights I did not want to get out there," he says.

He moved back to New York in 1986, and split amicably with Rosemary (two years later, she married Danny Goldberg, who is now chairman of Warner Bros. Records). He published a collection of poems, *The Book of Nods*, which even Carroll admits wasn't totally successful. "Rock and roll kind of screwed up my voice, poetically. I found myself having this 'Beat' voice in my poems. It was like this self-fulfilled prophecy, because everybody was calling me this rock poet, this Beat poet."

Carroll moved back to Inwood, two blocks from his old building. His mother had died, and he had made peace with his father, who was reduced to visiting her grave every day. He also wrote a sequel to *The Basketball Diaries*, which he called *Forced Entries*. The book was a journal of tawdry, Warholian downtown New York in the early seventies.

Carroll arrives at Rosemary's office. He's there to view a short film by a worshipful NYU student based on the final, cathartic passage of *Forced Entries*. Carroll's got a headache, so he asks a secretary for some Tylenol. He takes four, then wanders into a nearby conference room.

Cyril Connolly once said, "Whom the gods wish to destroy, they first call promising." Carroll sums it up a little differently: "I was always the young guy. And when you're successful when you're young, it leads to an arrested adolescence or something, y'know. And there's that ecstasy period in your life as an artist. Every artist goes through this. I tried to get it back at first with music, and got, y'know, that adrenaline. But," he says cautiously, "there's a time when you switch into a more sober period."

Carroll knows that after the film hype fades, he'll finally have time to work on two novels that he says "just came to me three or four years ago. Like a gift." One is about a miracle, two priests, and an investigation by the Vatican. (He's been brushing up on the Gnostics.) The other is about a young star painter who walks away from art in a spiritual crisis. There are no drugs, and the painter is a virgin. "These are straight, linear novels in the third person. My editor was shocked. He was like, 'Jim! These are money books.' But if I don't get to work on these things, boy, I am betraying a gift; I mean, that's what I would define as a sin."

It helps that Carroll has finally achieved a quiet writer's ritual. "It's like I've been so jubilant, I just eliminated that need." Carroll rises every morning around 4:30 A.M., when



he does his best writing. And he's shaken a nasty TV habit: "After that afternoon nap, it was always *Oprah* time. . . . So I got rid of cable and my VCR, but I found I was watching, like, infomercials instead of movies. But these days -" He pauses, indignant. "To me, late-night movies are old black-and-white movies with Cagney and Bogart, but today, old movies are like *The Sting II* with Jackie Gleason."

During the summer, he often teaches at Allen Ginsberg's Naropa Institute. He lectures and reads at colleges, maintaining little contact with the downtown New York he helped define, although he recently went to a viewing of *Diaries* at Rosemary's place with Lou Reed and Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore and Kim Gordon. "It moves well," he says. "It's hard for me to really register on it because of the personal attachment."

Carroll has been clean of heroin since the early seventies. He still has an occasional margarita, although he has never liked drinking. "I can't go for that complete-abstinence thing. I mean, I obviously have an addictive personality, especially for heroin. But I haven't smoked grass in like eight or nine years. I mean, I *wish* I could still smoke grass. But New York is just so speedy, it's so fast-paced. I mean, the phone's going to ring any minute and someone's going to lay a big trip on me, and I'll spend the first hour paranoid."

Source: Alex Williams, "Lord Jim," in *New York*, Vol. 28, No. 17, April 24, 1995, pp. 64-66.

Adaptations

In 1994, *The Basketball Diaries* was adapted as an abridged audiobook by Audio Literature. The audio diaries are read by the author. The same audiobook is also available as an audio download from audible.com, an on-line audiobook retailer.

The Basketball Diaries was also adapted as a film in 1995 by Island Pictures and New Line Cinema. Directed by Scott Kalvert, the film featured Leonardo DiCaprio as Carroll. It also featured Lorraine Bracco, Mark Wahlberg, Juliette Lewis, Ernie Hudson, and a small role for Carroll himself. The film, which is set in the 1990s, retains much of the book's 1960s language and slang, giving the film an anachronistic feel. It is available on DVD from Ryko Distribution and contains many special features, including interviews with several cast members and an anti-drug trailer.



Topics for Further Study

On an enlarged map of Manhattan, plot the approximate dates and locations for the major events in the book. Research the history of these areas and try to find other, highly publicized events that took place in these areas. Plot these dates and descriptions as well.

Watch the film adaptation of *The Basketball Diaries* and compare it to the book.

Find another region in the 1960s that experienced as much drug use, prostitution, and crime as New York. Write a two-page portrait of what life was like for individuals who grew up in this area during this time.

Research the current drug problem in the United States, and compare it to the drug problem in the 1960s. What methods of enforcement have been used in each time period to slow or stop the sale and use of drugs? What has been the economic impact of the drug problem in each era?

Choose a professional athlete, from any point in history, who has been caught using drugs. Write a biography about this person, including whether the athlete used drugs as a teenager and what happened to this person when he or she was caught.



Compare and Contrast

1960s: Young American men are sent, often through the draft and against their will, to fight in the Vietnam War. Some seek to escape the horrors of guerrilla war by using illicit drugs like marijuana and heroin - the latter of which is cheap and readily available in Southeast Asia.

Today: Following terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, D.C., the United States engages in a war against terrorism, including military engagements in the Middle East. The terrorist attacks spark a patriotic response, and many young men and women choose to enlist in the armed forces.

1960s: The use of illicit drugs spreads into the mainstream United States. The counterculture movement of the 1960s and 1970s helps to promote this increased use of drugs, especially marijuana and LSD. Heroin, which is used by junkies (drug addicts), is often avoided by hippies.

Today: The heroin-related deaths of River Phoenix, Kurt Cobain, and other prominent celebrities spark a national awareness of heroin abuse. Although the use of illicit drugs is still a problem in the United States, drug use has dropped by nearly 45 percent since its peak in the late 1970s.

1960s: Sexual freedom becomes a hallmark of the decade. Pregnancy is less a concern with the increased use of birth-control pills. Likewise, some sexually transmitted diseases, like gonorrhea, can often be treated by easily obtained prescription antibiotics.

Today: Although U.S. youth still engage widely in sexual activity, the risks today are much greater as a result of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), a disease that is generally transmitted through unprotected sex, the sharing of drug needles, and blood transfusions.

What Do I Read Next?

Although many today only know Carroll's prose writings, he made his start in the literary world as a poet. *Fear of Dreaming: The Selected Poems of Jim Carroll* (1993) includes poems from *Living at the Movies* (1973) and *The Book of Nods* (1986) as well as several more recent poems. This collection gives a portrait of Carroll as an artist in various stages of his writing career.

Carroll's *Forced Entries* (1987) continues the autobiographical story of the author's drug addiction, starting five years after the last entry in *The Basketball Diaries*. However, in his first diary collection, Carroll detailed how he became a heroin addict. In this one, he describes his fight to overcome his addiction.

In 1954, Aldous Huxley, a well-known author, published *The Doors of Perception*, a small, journalistic book detailing his experiences while under the influence of mescaline, a hallucinogenic drug. First-person accounts of drug use from later journalists like Hunter S. Thompson and Tom Wolfe have since overshadowed Huxley's book, which was very controversial in its time.

Hunter S. Thompson is infamous for the massive amounts of drugs that he uses in the course of writing his provocative journalistic pieces. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream* (1972), his best-known work, documents the journey of Thompson and a friend through Las Vegas. Over the course of the journey, the two men consume large amounts of alcohol, marijuana, mescaline, acid, cocaine, and various other drugs, while seeking the elusive American Dream.

Irvine Welsh's first novel, *Trainspotting* (1993), offers a gritty portrait of heroin addiction among teenagers in modern Edinburgh, Scotland. The main character, Mark Renton, like Carroll in *The Basketball Diaries*, spends most of his time on the street with a gang of delinquents who do whatever it takes—including committing a variety of crimes—to get their next heroin fix.

Further Study

Baum, Dan, *Smoke and Mirrors: The War on Drugs and the Politics of Failure*, Little, Brown, 1997.

This retrospective look at the United States' war on drugs deviates from other books in this genre that tend to use anecdotes to depict the government as deliberate participants in the spread of drugs. Instead, Baum, a journalist, provides balanced criticism about why the war on drugs has failed, using facts to back up his assertions.

Braunstein, Peter, and Michael William Doyle, eds., *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s*, Routledge, 2001.

This collection of essays offers a thorough examination of the major cultural issues in the 1960s and 1970s. Topics include Drugs in the Sixties Counterculture, Insurgent Youth and the Sixties Culture of Rejuvenation, Film and the Counterculture, and Media and Pop Culture.

Holmes, Ann, *The Mental Effects of Heroin*, The Encyclopedia of Psychological Disorders, Little, Brown, 1997.

Holmes reviews the history of heroin use, discusses the physical and psychological effects of using heroin, and talks about the causes of and various treatments for heroin addiction. The book also includes several appendices, including contact information for substance-abuse agencies, heroin-related statistical tables, a bibliography, and a glossary of drug-related terms.



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The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". © 1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Nonfiction Classics for Students (NCfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's □For Students□ Literature line, NCfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on



□classic□ novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NCfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NCfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel; and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized



Each entry, or chapter, in NCfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- **Introduction:** a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- **Author Biography:** this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- **Plot Summary:** a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- **Characters:** an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in *Invisible Man*—the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- **Themes:** a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- **Style:** this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- **Historical Context:** This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- **Critical Overview:** this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- **Criticism:** an essay commissioned by NCfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).



- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an "at-a-glance" comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NCfS includes "The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature," a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Nonfiction Classics for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NCfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NCfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.



Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Nonfiction Classics for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Nonfiction Classics for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NCfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Nonfiction Classics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NCfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Nonfiction Classics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NCfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Nonfiction Classics for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NCfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Nonfiction Classics for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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