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## Jim Carroll, escape artist

A writer comes back from the edge

By Joseph Menn Contributing Reporter

Jim Carroll appreciates the value of an accessible metaphor.

Here, then, is one for this moment in his life: Jim Carroll is on the way back from the edge, and he is as compelled to describe his recovery from heroin addiction and the narcissism of the New York-Andy Warhol scene as he did to describe the way he climbed there from the streets.

Carroll knows a gripping image when he sees, or hallucinates, one He doesn't have to look beyond his own brilliant and tortured life for the material that now fills a second novelistic diary, two volumes of critically acclaimed poetry, and three influential New Wave rock albums.

Raised in a tough Irish neighborhood on the upper West Side of Manhattan, Carroll first injected heroin into his "virgin veins" at 13. He lied, cheated, stole, hustled. He also played first-rate basketball, earning a scholarship to an old-money prep school where he sold drugs and fell in love with poetry.

Through it all - the deaths of teenaged friends, brief stays in jail, flirtations with death - the fragilelooking, intense Carroll kept an anecdotal diary of his adventures and his growing up. "The Basketball Diaries" was published in whole only after Carroll established himself as a poetic prodigy in the '60s. It is the unique record of a wise-ass kid who needed to write discovering why and how he would.

Even before the appearance of his first book of poems, "Living at the Movies," when he was 22, Carroll was an integral part of the grandeur and high camp that defined the New York artistic scene of the '60s and early '70s. Adorned with long, light red hair, wandering blue eyes and a crucifix. Carroll took the wrong drugs at the right parties and hung out at Warhol's club, Max's Kansas City, where Lou Reed and the Velvet Underground played two times a

night, six days a week. The 36-year-old Carroll, in Boston last night to read from his



Globe staff photo/Thomas Landers

Writer and rock artist Jim Corroll

## rroll: Making his way as an escape artist Carroll remembers Warhol

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The shyness and stagefright of Although many of his friends stand why they didn't fight back when construction workers number at a concert. "I had too he says. Things changed when punk rock came to America in the

of an affinity with punks first time in San Diego one night Catholic Boy." The songs on the are creative. A poor singer, Carroll simplified images from his poems

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Carroll continues to grow as he ing of life. He is at work on an bands from different genres: There are some observations I'd

prefers a more abstract and honest version. "In California, I conedge into wisdom by being by my

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## Jim Carroll: Making his way as an escape ar

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new sequel to "The Basketball Diaries," said in a hotel-room interview yesterday that he doesn't see much of Allen Ginsberg or Bob Dylan or the other people he knew then, except for Reed, a close friend. But the new book, "Forced Entries: The Downtown Diaries 1971-1973," talks about those days and his mind-and-body escape to a temporary retreat in Northern California, where he kicked heroin and worked on his

The title is a pun on the diffi-culty of getting off hard drugs and continuing to write diary-like entries. "The words were moving like parked cars, or the cars in those NYU student films, moving all over the place too fast," Carroll says. He doesn't dwell on the physical pain - it's been done before. But writing around it was a struggle, he says. "You don't forget pain like that. Even when I was retyping [the book], it was a catharthis.

ONE PERFORMANCE ONLY!

While "Forced Entries" is being marketed as a sequel to "The Basketball Diaries," Carroll says he sees it more as a novel. The events are based on real experiences, but most of the book wasn't written as it happened. He describes listening to the Velvets, for example, when they had actually broken up some time earlier. The entries are compressions and distillations of what he felt and saw during that time.

Talking to Carroll, his technique is easy to understand. He jumps around, figuratively and literally, swooping down and capturing one epiphany or incident and then rising off uncertainly, almost directionless until an idea strikes him moments later. "I don't have a photographic memory; it never helped me in school when I was studying for an exam. But I have a great memory for images, even for something that happened a year or two earlier. Lou is always amazed by that.'

If Carroll's current reclusive life and his time-distanced new work represent a rescue of his body and spirit, then he is a kind of escape artist. He escaped being a fourth-generation bartender; he escaped the streets; he escaped the nouveau riche. He escaped the "what you see is what you get," skin-deep art of the Warhol Factory crowd, and he always will be

escaping drugs. "I tried to escape the street rhythm of 'The Basketball Diaries' with the erudition of poetry," he says

Two of Carroll's favorite images from "Forced Entries" embody his perverse attraction for the counter-life he is both living and escaping. "One of the strongest things there is that anonymous sex in Times Square, the feeling that you have to uncage something within yourself every two months. I say it dissipates like a bottle of uncapped perfume." And the final, dominant metaphor is a huge abscess on the inside of his arm, filled with subhuman yellow and green slime, a post-addic-

after quitting heroin.

What comes across as almost supernatural in Carroll is the success of his drive, unwavering since puberty, to express himself by any means necessary. In "The Basketball Diaries, evolves from simple - though well written - bragging about early bouts of drugs, sex and crime to refined explorations of the psychology of those around him. He begins to address the reader directly, assuring him of the veracity and intensity of his experiences.

The shyness and stagefright of his first poetry readings have never left him. But Carroll observed how others got their messages out. and music had a particular appeal for him - initially the politicized folk music of Dylan and Phil Ochs. Although many of his friends were hippies, he couldn't understand why they didn't fight back when construction workers tarred-and-feathered one of their number at a concert. "I had too much of the street still inside me. he says. Things changed when punk rock came to America in the late '70s. "I immediately felt more of an affinity with punks.

Carroll allowed then-girlfriend and poet-rocker Patti Smith to talk him into going onstage for the first time in San Diego one night when she couldn't perform. Backed up by Smith's band, he rapped half-poetry to an enthusiastic crowd, and in the early '80s he released his first record, 'Catholic Boy." The songs on the bestselling album are sharp, funny and at times as scary as they are creative. A poor singer, Carroll says he had to use his voice as a rhythym instrument. He williag simplified images from his present to make them more access and concentrated on the in his phrasing of lass too late/ To fall in less see

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