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Books of The Times

By Christopher Lehmann-Haupt

THE BASKETBALL DIARIES. By Jim Carroll. 210 pages. Viking Penguin. Paper, \$6.95.

FORCED ENTRIES. The Downtown Diaries: 1971-1973. By Jim Carroll. 184 pages. Viking Penguin. Paper, \$6.95.

JIM CARROLL is a poet and rock musician in his mid-30's who grew up in several poor sections of Manhattan, the son and grandson of Irish Catholic bartenders. In the fall of 1963, when he was all of 13 years old, he began keeping a diary: "Today was my first Biddy League game and my first day in any organized basketball league. I'm enthused about life due to this exciting event. The Biddy League is a league for anyone 12 yrs. old or under. I'm actually 13 but my coach Lefty gave me a fake birth certificate."

The diary project proved successful. He kept it for at least three years, later published excerpts of it in *The Paris Review* and other magazines, and eventually brought out a version of it in book form, "The Basketball Diaries" (1978), which created something of a sensation for its hair-raising portrait of adolescent street life in New York.

It was not a book that seemed likely to produce a sequel. 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, the diary's final entry leaves its author on the brink of the abyss:

"Totally zonked, and all the dope scraped or sniffed clean from the tiny cellophane bags. Four days of temporary death gone by, no more bread, with its hundreds of nods and casual theories, soaky nostalgia (I could have got that for free walking along Fifth Avenue at noon), at any rate, a thousand goofs, some still hazy in my noodle... Nice June day out today, lots of people probably graduating. I can see the Cloisters with its million in medieval art out the bedroom window. I got to go in and puke. I just want to be pure."

But behold, a sequel has now been published, "Forced Entries: The Downtown Diaries, 1971-1973," which appears along with a new edition of "The Basketball Diaries." Jim Carroll is 20 as it opens. He regrets having thrown away his basketball career — "I'm sitting here watching the N.B.A. All-Star Game on TV and I'm watching guys I used to seriously abuse on the court scoring in double figures now against the best in the game."

But he's embraced the life he's leading — hanging out at Max's Kansas City, working for Andy Warhol at the Factory, publishing occasional poems, socializing with the likes of



Tamela Glenn

Jim Carroll

Allen Ginsberg, Bob Dylan, George Balanchine and William S. Burroughs, and doing drugs even more intensely, if possible.

The voice is grown up now. There are occasional vestiges of its origins ("That was it for Anne and Ted and I...") but the whine and the adolescent strutting are gone. The author now admits that the entries are "embellished and fictionalized to some extent... mainly for the sake of humor," which, he has found, "has an uncanny ability to create its own energy and push on a writer against his will."

He is reaching for something deeper now. Instead of hip talk, he's trying for poetry. Of a stately Times Square prostitute he writes, "The whole effect... was as if someone had placed a Rubens portrait at the bottom of a cesspool, and after centuries of strangeness and decay among the stillness of vile things and vile notions, some chance lightning hit... and out of it she was risen... delivered onto these streets in a pink Cadillac."

Instead of teen-age bravado, he writes of violent suicide, of "evil as a pervasive entity," and of the emptiness of adolescent fantasies. "And what is it you want?" he asks of his desire for a fashion model he sees on an elevator. "It is not sexual, though you do want her. You want her because, in some unfathomed way, she is the proof, the proof of those things you always knew existed but could not define. Yet you've had women like this in the past, and in the end they proved nothing. They solved nothing. They were usually not too bright and were terribly self-indulgent. They were, as this one is, only another emblem of your own vanity, and the vanity of your Art."

Despite the maturing voice of "Forced Entries," the two diaries remain similar in their quest for extreme sensations and their eagerness to shock the reader. One is aware almost throughout that the author is more intelligent than he appears and that he takes a certain pride in dissipating his gifts.

And yet the diarist finally gains control of himself. The image with which he dramatizes his victory over drugs will disgust many readers, just as many of his effects will seem excessively overwrought. But readers who can stomach the ending of "Forced Entries" will find it both effective and convincing. And beside the description of his cure there is the external evidence of the poetry collections he has published since 1973 — "Living at the Movies" (1973) and "The Book of Nods" (1986) — as well as the three music albums he has released — "Catholic Boy," "Dry Dreams" and "I Write Your Name."

But whether or not one believes Jim Carroll's redemption, his two diaries constitute a remarkable account of New York City's lower depths. At the very least, they should serve further to demystify the usefulness of drugs to writers. Finally, the main reason that Mr. Carroll decides to kick his habit is for the sake of his art. "It's my only choice for my work. I need a consistency of my moods if there is to be any consistency in my style. I can't attempt to write always in the hollow flux of desperation and incipient error. I try to cover this up, cover behind some facade of humor, hoping that old Aristotle was right — that humor will act as a catalyst to purify the tragic. But it can't go on. My body is broke."

He has to mend himself, unpleasant though the purging proves to be.



Kim Dae-jung

Random House to Buy Schocken Books

By EDWIN McDOWELL

Random House agreed yesterday to purchase Schocken Books, the family-owned publishing house that was founded by refugees from Nazi Germany and that had Hannah Arendt as its first editor. When the agreement takes effect, Schocken — which owns worldwide rights to the works of Franz Kafka — will become an imprint of Pantheon Books, a division of Random House that was also founded in the 1940's by refugees from Nazi Germany.

"It's an extraordinary coincidence and an extraordinary marriage of the two lists," said Robert Bernstein, chief executive of Random House.

Pantheon publishes about 70 new titles a year, most of them nonfiction. Schocken's list has dwindled in recent years from more than 100 titles annually to about eight, but its backlist contains 500 titles. These include a large Judaica list, books by Primo Levi, Martin Buber, Elie Wiesel, Elias Canetti and S. Y. Anon, the last three of whom are Nobel Prize win-

ners, as well as all 15 books written by Kafka. Andre Schiffrin, Pantheon's managing director, said he expected to commission new translations of Kafka.

Long undercapitalized, Schocken last month sold 600 letters Kafka wrote to his fiancée, Felice Bauer. It was widely assumed that the \$605,000 in proceeds from the auction would be used to reinvigorate the faltering company.

'Best Caretaker' Sought

"That was our hope," said David I. Rome, Schocken's president. "But it's increasingly difficult for an independent operation our size to compete, so we decided to see who would be the best caretaker for our books." Several buyers expressed interest in Schocken, which reportedly asked \$3.5 million, and it received at least one other firm offer — from Lord Weidenfeld, who with Ann Getty owns Weidenfeld & Nicolson and Grove Press.

Mr. Rome, a grandson of the company's founder, added that Schocken was also a victim of the success of its

two best sellers in the early 1980's, "Masquerade" by Kit Williams, an illustrated fantasy about a rabbit, and "When Bad Things Happen to Good People" by Rabbi Harold S. Kushner. "A number of publishers told me a best seller is the worst thing that can happen to a small company," he said. "That was borne out with those two books. We earned significant profits, but then we went out and made a lot of purchases that weren't as carefully thought out. We overexpanded, our inventory got out of hand, then we had to retrench."

The company was started in Berlin in 1931, with the idea of publishing the best books by Jewish writers and poets. Two years later Salman Schocken migrated to Palestine and subsequently opened another publishing house, in Tel Aviv. His German company acquired world rights to Kafka in 1934, after the Nazis decreed that Jewish writers could only be published by Jewish publishing houses. In America, Schocken's first book was "The Penal Colony," a collection of the only six stories Kafka allowed to be published during his lifetime.

Four Women—
Cousins and Sisters, Enemies and Allies...

"Little Women it ain't."—USA Today

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