

THE JAMES JONES LITERARY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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The James Jones Society newsletter is published quarterly to keep members and interested parties apprised of activities, projects and upcoming events of the Society; to promote public interest and academic research in the works of James Jones; and to celebrate his memory and legacy.

Submissions of essays, features, anecdotes, photographs, etc., that pertain to author James Jones may be sent to the co-editors for publication consideration. Every attempt will be made to return material, if requested upon submission. Material may be edited for length, clarity and accuracy. Send submissions to 2609 N. High Cross Rd., Urbana, IL 61802 or tales@soltec.net .

Writers guidelines available upon request and online.

The James Jones Literary Society

<http://rking.vinu.edu/j.htm>

Online information about the James Jones First Novel Fellowship

<http://wilkes.edu/~english/jones.html>

Robinson Recognizes Jones As Native Son With Highway Signs

More than 40 years after he left east central Illinois never to return, James Jones' hometown of Robinson, Illinois, welcomed him back permanently with signs at the city limits telling the world he was a native son. The dedication ceremony for the signs was to be held at the city limit on the Trimble Spur (State Route 1A) on Wednesday, May 17, but was moved to the City Council chambers due to rain. There, Society board members helped unveil the nearly three foot high by six foot long sign, the largest approved by the State of Illinois.

Robinson Mayor Wally Dean said recognition of Jones in Robinson was "long overdue."

"Our community has failed to recognize James Jones," Dean said, "and I want to start to reverse that trend."

Kaylie Jones, the author's daughter, was unable to attend the ceremony but sent the following statement:

"I am terribly sorry to be unable to join you on this momentous occasion, but previous obligations are keeping me away from Robinson today.

"It is truly a great day for American Literature when one of its master writers is recognized by his hometown. James Jones was first and foremost an American: he loved his country, particularly the Midwest, and his home of Robinson.

"But it is the job of every great novelist to be honest and truthful in his portrayal of places and characters he loves, even if such a portrayal includes the darker and less positive sides of life. And I can tell you from personal experience that even while James Jones lived the expatriate life abroad, he never lost sight of his roots, his origins-nor did he ever lose his Midwesterner's accent and down-to-earth dignity-and he remained to the end a staunch defender of his homeland.

"He had planned for years to bring the family back to Robinson for a visit, but he ran out of time. Perhaps he felt that he might not have been completely welcome and thus resisted his desire to show his children his hometown.

"Now, 23 years after his death, he is being welcomed home in honor. I thank you all for being her today, and making this possible."

1999 Symposium Speakers Series

Betty Comden

Editor's Note: The following text is lyricist and screenwriter Betty Comden's edited remarks from the June 1999 James Jones Literary Society Symposium at the Southampton Campus of Long Island University. This is the third in a series of the distinguished speakers' edited comments to be published:

My husband and I were great friends with Jim and Gloria Jones, starting from their wedding day when they arrived at the Oloffson Hotel (in Port-au-Prince, Haiti), and the owner of the hotel said, 'Guess who got married here today? James Jones.' And then we met this couple, and it was four-way love at first sight and we remained friends.

I just wanted to digress a tiny bit to say something about Kaylie Jones, who is a professor at school here who is a novelist in her own right, and a very successful one. The thing is that-this has nothing to do with James Jones' teaching his daughter, but I met Kaylie when she was 2-years-old. Her mother Gloria, had gone in a car, they were living in Jamaica at the time, and Gloria was driving the car and the little 2-year-old cherub Kaylie was sitting next to her. The car

was surrounded by a bunch of Rastafari and natives who wore long dreadlocks and were pretty scary, and they started rocking the car and hurling implications at it and her. And calling her everything under the sun. Among the things they kept saying was, "Fuck you, white lady," and they pushed the car, and Gloria somehow had the courage to step on the gas and pull away.

The next day she came to the airport to meet Steve and me, and Kaylie was with her. As I came toward the car and Gloria introduced us, this golden-haired cherub looked up and said, "Fuck you, white lady." That word and other words like it became a kind of contention between Jim and me.

I always admired his writing. I thought he was a brilliant writer, but we used to argue about how many four-letter words could you use in a sentence. And I always used to say that I thought a reasonable amount was enough to make a point, but that Jim used too many. Well, this became an argument over the years. He thought I was rather prissy, sort of school-teacherish. There is a character in *Go to the Widowmaker*, who is a school teacher and kind of prissy, and there may be something of me in that, I don't know. We never settled that argument, but he used to tease me. I did think he had a beautiful writing style and it would have been clearer and stronger with a little less use of those words.

In any case though, Jim used to always show me his work. He would show me paragraphs, sometimes chapters of things that he had just written and always seemed to value my opinion, which of course, made me very happy. It was a great friendship and lasted and lasted.

We met at the Oloffson and then we remained friends. And when we came to New York, we got them an apartment, and then Jim admired my husband's clothes. Jim had about two workshirts, a pair of jeans, maybe a jean jacket, and Steve had this splendid wardrobe. The first thing he wanted Steve to do was to get him a wardrobe. So in New York, he took him to a man named Woody Sills, who outfitted him. And then Jim was quite a dandy after that. He loved clothes. He had this marvelous taste. He was a very fancy, wonderful dresser.

So, we remained friends and we visited each other wherever. They moved to Paris, which broke our hearts, but we stayed in touch. We visited them there and then they had a house in Jamaica for a year. The time we went to visit them-and we visited them several times there-that's when Jim was writing *Go to the Widowmaker*. He was in Jamaica. He was skin-diving, and when Steve and I arrived, he insisted that Steve take some lessons in skin-diving. I think two lessons in a pool were considered enough experience to go down into the depths. Gloria and I were out on the boat with two guys and we watched them put on their gear and go backwards up over the side of the boat, possibly never to be seen again. It was terrifying, terrifying.

I remember Jim came up once a little bit later when they were both down there and he wanted the underwater camera. So, he went down with the camera, and then later when they scrambled up and Steve said, "You disappeared for a while," and Jim said, "Well, I went up to get the camera. There was a shark near you, and I wanted to take a picture."

But I remember in spite of the arguments about Jim and the writing-there was one thing: In *Go to the Widowmaker* there's a beautiful chapter about skin-diving, about what it's like to go down to

the bottom of the ocean and to be that close to something so primordial and beautiful and inexplicable and this kind of the euphoric feeling. I was reading this long paragraph-it was a page or two of describing the man going down to the bottom of the ocean-and I was thinking this is really poetic, really beautiful writing and is extraordinary, and I must tell Jim how much I love it and admire it. Then the thing continues, and I was just adrift at the beauty of it, and he said, "And then he got to the bottom of the ocean and sat on the ocean floor and masturbated." So, you know, that's fine. OK, but it's not the picture I wanted to see of the man at the bottom of the ocean floor.

I think a lot of people had the impression that Jim was pugilistic and war-like and tough. And he was. And he was tough-talking and heavy-drinking, and he did fight a lot. But that wasn't all he was. He had a very poetic nature and a deeply sympathetic and empathetic one. I remember one night, Steve and I, and Adolph Green, my partner, and his wife, we took the Joneses to Brooklyn to see Judy Garland, who was trying to make one of her numerous comebacks. She had done that and then she had slipped again and so she was in a big night club way out in Brooklyn and we went there and we were friends of hers. We sat down and she came out and started to sing and stopped. And she couldn't go on. She just broke down and left the stage, and it was just frightening and sad. So we went back with Jim and Gloria, and Jim was so upset about Judy and what had happened to her, he ran out to the car and he got a copy of *The Pistol*. He had a copy of his manuscript in the car and he wanted to do something for her. He brought that back in and he signed it and gave it to Judy, and she was thrilled to have it and it kind of helped her evening, helped to get through and helped her feel more like a person again. Jim was so sympathetic, he couldn't bear to see her suffering.

Then I remember being with Gloria in Texas at the Harry Ransom Library in Austin where they had put up a whole-they have all of Jim's papers and they had an exhibition of his things with a big table set up, and Gloria's novel, that Budd mentioned, was there-a copy of her novel-and pictures, of course, from *From Here to Eternity* and all of Jim's books and this copy of *The Pistol*. Because when Judy Garland died, her papers were put up for auction. I guess some woman bought it, bought a lot of stuff, and had, among Judy's things, Jim's copy of *The Pistol*. So when the time came, she gave it to the University of Texas and it was such a full-circle moment, standing there and seeing Gloria pick up this copy and remembering all the times we had spent together. [That copy of *The Pistol* is in the University of Illinois Library.]

You know he was all the tough things that everybody says, but the hero of *From Here to Eternity* is not pugilistic; in fact, he was a fighter who wouldn't fight because he killed someone in the ring, and he was a poet. He was a musician. He was an artist. He was not the typical soldier or the brutal character. I think Jim hated brutality and hated all those terrible things about the Army. At the same time, I think he loved the idea of this society of men and the kind of friendships that could come out of that situation, but the brutality end of it he hated. And Pruitt, of course, was an artist and I think with his sensitivity, very much like Jim.

When I went to see Jim in the hospital-he was dying-he said to me, "Get me some poetry." I said, "Sure." I had a rented house out here, so I ran home, picked up a book-it was an anthology of American poetry-and I ran back to the hospital with it and he looked up and said, "No, I want Yeats, I want Yeats." He said, "This isn't poetry." He didn't like the whole book I brought him.

He was indeed an enormous admirer of Yeats. And he used to read it aloud in the evenings sometimes; we'd hear him read. And he was deeply moved by the poetry.

There were so many things that seemed contradictory, are contradictory about him. Apparently Jim was a very small and rather weak, sickly child with bad eyes-and nothing to do with a macho kind of personality-and he was deeply affected I think by it. Then his father committed suicide when he was a youngster; he shot himself. And all those things shaped him in ways, you just looked at the outside. You just looked at the kind of public persona, you didn't see any of these things, but as all his friends who have talked to you already, knew, he had this very, very sensitive poetic inside.

I'm just very happy I knew him. He was also a lyricist. He wrote the lyrics to *Re-enlistment Blues*. That was a big hit. A big hit song. He was not that crazy about the theater. He and Bill Styron-I think Bill got to like the theater a lot because he wrote plays. But before that when they came to New York and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolfe?* had just opened, it was the hottest ticket in town. I mean, you couldn't get near it. So they said could I get them tickets for it, and I did. It wasn't easy. I got them four seats and I said, "Well, after the show, come over to the house and we'll have supper here."

About 9 o'clock, I had curlers in my hair and cream or whatever, and I went to the door and there they were. They had left after the first act. I was stunned. So they didn't like it, and I had a feeling in discussions I had with them-I thought that they felt that playwriting was not writing. I mean, it wasn't writing as they knew it. I don't think they respected it quite the same way, but then as I say, Bill did write some plays, and they were good. So he changed.

And I think if Jim could hear me standing up here burbling on, he'd look at me and say, "Fuck you, white lady."

10th Annual James Jones Literary Society Symposium

October 28, 2000

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Make your hotel reservations in the Urbana-Champaign area now, and plan to attend what is sure to be another fascinating symposium.

Here is the proposed schedule (subject to change):

8:30-9 a.m. - Registration & Refreshments, Rare Book Room of the UI Library

9-10 a.m. - Society Board Meeting

10-11 a.m. - James Jones & The Illinois Connection

11 a.m.-noon - The Colony in Marshall, Ill.

Noon-1 p.m. - Lunch on your own

1-2 p.m. - James Jones' War Writings: An Overview

2-3 p.m. - James Jones & Two Wars: World War II and Vietnam, featuring keynote speaker Gerald Linderman, history professor emeritus, University of Michigan

3:30-4:30 p.m. - The Music of World War II, featuring WWII veterans of Medicare 7, 8 or 9 Dixieland Jazz Band

4:30 p.m. - Visit to Jones Exhibit in the Rare Book Room of the UI Library

The UI Library and Kaylie Jones will conduct a special Writers' Workshop on Friday, Oct. 27. For more information, call Barbara Jones at 217/333-3777.

Jones' Boyhood Home Awaits Its Fate

The boyhood home of James Jones still stands on East Walnut Street, just east of the Robinson (Ill.) Square, a silent reminder that one of America's great writers lived there as a boy and a young man.

Now empty, the house awaits its fate with one side eyeing an encroaching parking lot already creeping down the block and the entire house awaiting further demise and eventual destruction for the parking lot or a modern-day makeover to save the house for a home rather than a living historical site. All activity has stopped dead, waiting for somebody to decide what to do with the house.

It was purchased by Jack Morris, grandson of the founder of the Heath Candy Company in Robinson and a James Jones Literary Society board member, with the intent that something be done to preserve the home and maintain some of the Jones memorabilia. When that idea wasn't picked up, Morris sold the house to Larry Waldrop, who started doing necessary structural work to save the house. That apparently done, the idea hasn't gone any farther.

From what I can gather, there wasn't and isn't widespread local interest in preserving the home for one reason or another, most of which has nothing to do with the fact that James Jones will be remembered for his realistic portrayal of men at war, particularly in World War II, for hundreds of years.

Robinson-near-Wabash may not become the tourist attraction for Jones and his work as Stratford-upon-Avon became for William Shakespeare and his work, but the Jones boyhood home could be an asset to the community and the Society.

As president of the Society and co-editor of its newsletter, I regularly see inquiries from around the world about Jones' work or his life. Sometimes somebody will ask about his home, if there's anything there to see. Sadly, I tell them the house is there, barely, but at least it's not a parking lot yet.

How long that will be true is anybody's guess. Still, I hear about signed copies of first editions, letters and other things that might be available were the house to be preserved as a museum or a historical site. I received a letter not long ago from a man who said his father still had several items that Jones had given him when he left Marshall in the late 1950s. Undoubtedly, there are other things that could be traced to Jones or could be used to decorate the house in period style and preserved for posterity.

I've always hoped that the Society would end up with the house and use it as a local office where Jones memorabilia and material would be available to scholars and tourists and for tours when the annual symposia are held in Robinson. But the Society is not able to financially acquire the house, finish the restoration process that has been started, decorate it and fill it with antique furniture and then maintain it.

There are other options, I'm sure. I do think something needs to be done to save the house and maintain it as a museum of sorts. Maybe that could be done with grant money, contributions or other sources. However and whatever, it can and should be done for the community and for posterity.

I know there are people who want to see the house saved and would like to see some parts of a native son's life available for public use and display. The window of opportunity for that possibility is closing. I hate to see it slammed shut forever.

--Ray Elliott, President

Letters to The Society

Robinson Native 'Discovers' Work Of Jones

As a native of Robinson, I have always been aware of James Jones' work. I am somewhat ashamed to admit, however, that it was not until last year that I began to read his books.

I have just started *From Here to Eternity*, and have been amazed I waited so long to begin reading. I plan on contacting the JJLS to become a member and will also include my wife and newborn daughter!

I have been appalled by the lack of promotion on the part of Robinson officials of the heritage that is in town, and was excited to read in the newsletter that long-overdue signs are being erected.

Also, do you have the street address for his boyhood home on Walnut Street in Robinson? My mother and other family members still live there, and I would like to see the house the next time I'm home.

**-- Darrell Hampsten
Publisher
Maryville (Ill.) Voice**

Editor's note: The dedication for the city limits signs noting Robinson is the hometown of James Jones was held this past May 15. The sign has been put up on the Trimble Spur (State Route 1A) where the dedication ceremony was planned. Robinson Mayor Wally Dean said signs at the other city limits will be up by the end of summer. The Jones house is at 202 E. Walnut St. and is currently empty. It's the first house on the north (left) side of the street as you go east on Walnut from the south side of the Robinson Square. You can't miss it.

Jones' Short Stories Merit Attention, Too

For nearly 35 years, I had a copy of *Ice Cream Headaches & Other Stories* but wouldn't you know it, when I finally wanted to settle in and re-read it a couple months ago, it seems to have gotten lost.

It has long been one of my favorite books of short stories, and I've wondered why Jones' short story work hasn't been given more attention by those who follow him so closely.

-- Jeff Kaley, Duncan, Okla.

*Editor's note: Good question. James Jones' war fiction reaps the most attention, but he has some very good short stories among his collected work that warrant attention. Regarding copies of *Ice Cream Headaches and Other Stories*, Society board member Dwight Connelly is a book dealer and is usually able to find books at reasonable prices. As an example, we wanted a copy of *Viet Journal* to review for the upcoming Oct. 28 symposium at the University of Illinois. Connelly had some and sent back the following message when we queried him about a copy: "If you just want a reading copy, I have the paperback version for \$12., plus postage. I also have a 2nd edition hardback for \$20, or a first edition hardback signed for \$200. This is one of the more difficult Jones books to locate." Connelly can be contacted at bookscd@ccipost.net and has Jones work available at Society symposia each year.*

Options Still Exist For Saving Jones' Boyhood Home

RE: Ray Elliott's column on the James Jones House in the Robinson Daily News, a version of which appears in this newsletter.

Since the Society is, I believe, a 501 (c) 3, if Larry Waldrop is the current owner, could he use a tax deduction? It is easier to get donations for bricks-and-mortar-type monuments than less tangible things. Has the Society tried to obtain bequests or memorials from members who may want to contribute for this worthy cause in their wills? The Society may wish to consider hiring a professional fund-raiser to do a capital campaign.

**-- Kim Cox
San Diego, Calif.**

P.S. Not a parking lot YET! (Love it.)

Editor's note: The house sits silently in abeyance, waiting to be rescued from the wrecking ball and oblivion.

**Lennon's New
Book On Mailer
Includes Jones
Citation**

Past JJLS president and current Board member J. Michael Lennon has just published with another Society member, his wife Donna Pedro Lennon, a bio-bibliography titled, *Norman Mailer: Works and Days*, a 280-page annotated and cross-referenced compilation of 1,110 utterances by Mailer in English.

The volume, some 15 years in the making, also includes a life chronology, 81 photographs of Mailer, his family and friends, and his books, a secondary bibliography (also annotated) and several appendices. It is fully indexed. Norman Mailer has written a preface for the volume, which is published by Sligo Press (67 S. Pioneer, Shavertown, PA 18708; Phone: 570-696-5449).

Works and Days includes nine citations that reference James Jones and a 1952 photograph of Mailer and Jones.

One citation refers to Jones' role in convincing Mailer of the merits and justice of karma during Mailer's 1953 visit to The Colony in Marshall, Ill. The exchange is reported in Laura Adams' 1975 interview with Mailer which appeared in *Partisan Review* (Summer 1975).

Mailer says: "At any rate, Jones went on about it [karma] and I said, 'You believe in that?' Because I was an atheist and a socialist in those days. He said, 'Oh, sure. That's the only thing that makes sense.' I thought about it over and over and in the last three or four years I began to think, 'Yes, that does make sense. Jones was right.'"

For more information on the volume, e-mail: sligo_press@hotmail.com.