

Good Karma Soup

By Ken Harris

I guess if I'm going to tell you about Jim Singh, I'm going to have to go to the bottom of it all, all those years ago when I first saw Jim walking down Martin's Avenue in Hawthorne where I grew up. Hawthorne was just a little area outside Baltimore. It was a bunch of houses spread out over a couple hundred acres of what used to be the better part of Martin's Plantation. Everybody in Hawthorne had a story, but I can't tell them all right now. No, I'm just going to tell you about Jim Singh, and about me and Jim, and about all the stuff that happened way back when, it's thirty years, I think, and about what happened the last time I saw Jim which was just a few days ago and which is what made me want to tell about it all in the first place.

As I was saying, the first time I saw Jim he was walking down Martin's Avenue from the corner of Cowpen's St. where the bus from the city stopped. Jay Sawyer and I were just coming back from fishing. I saw Jim walking toward us and I said to Jay, "Who's that guy?" But Jay was too busy trying to light a cigarette, and once he got it lit he started blowing little puffs of smoke in my face and saying, "I can smoke just like pa." I hadn't started smoking yet and I probably would've told Jay to quit blowing that stuff in my face, but I was too interested in this strange looking guy walking toward us.

He was short and skinny. His eyes were small and strangely long, but they had a curiously nice look to them. He was one of those people who didn't smile just with his mouth but with his whole face. When he walked past us he nodded a little and his lips parted in this real happy grin. I had never seen teeth so white. I looked back at him as he walked by. He was carrying a satchel which was as big again as his whole body. I asked Jay what he thought of that strange guy and if he had ever seen him before, but Jay was still playing with his cigarette. "What guy?" he said, "I didn't see anybody."

The day Jim Singh opened his little cafe the whole block, no, the whole neighborhood took notice. Wasn't an everyday thing then like it is now for someone from another country to open a restaurant serving food that wasn't American. Back then, that is in the summer of 1939, Hawthorne was just a little suburb of Baltimore. The only thing notable about the whole area was that the fishing in Middle River and Back River was good, and the government was thinking about buying what was left of Martin's Plantation to build an airport, but that was just a rumor. The old boys, or all the men over twenty back then who are now grandfathers, they never thought the government would ever bring that airport to a little place like Hawthorne. Anyway, there weren't many restaurants around. In fact, there weren't any that I can remember till Jim's. Nowadays, there's hundreds. Roy Rogers, Friendly's, Little China and about thirty other Chinese places, and even some place called Eastern Sun which serves Taiwanese food. Things are pretty modern now, but before the war, things were different; there wasn't anybody who even thought of setting up a place like that. Not that anybody had a problem with it when Jim came to town. No, the old boys just figured it was part of becoming modern.

And before long everyone took pride in saying they had eaten in Jim's. Everybody called the place Jim's even though its real name was the New Asia Grill, but that wasn't unusual. The True Value hardware store across the street from Jim's was called Pete's, because the guy who owned it was named Pete. And the drug store was called Mcenroy's even though Douglas Mcenroy was only the guy who used to own it. He retired and moved to Lancaster and sold the store to John Lesston, but people still called the drug store Mcenroy's, not for any really good reason, it was just easier for them to do things they way they always had. Kids growing up in Hawthorne had always gotten their icecream sodas and licorice from a place called Mcenroy's. They lived on a sugar diet from the hand of an old man who gave out free lollipops and sometimes YooHoos and who always insisted that people call him Mister Doug even though everyone always said, "Thank you, Mr. Mcenroy," and, "Yes, I'd like a little extra chocolate, please, Mr. Mcenroy," and, "My Mom said she'll pick up the prescription tomorrow, Mr. Mcenroy." These kids, when they grew up, couldn't very well be expected to remember to tell their kids to go to some place called Lesston's, or worse yet- Rite Aid. So everyone sort of agreed on a name for a place which wouldn't actually always be the name on the sign, but it was the name that they always thought of, and for the New Asia Grill, that name was Jim's, because Jim was who everybody thought of when they thought of that place.

For a long time no one knew anything about Jim. He was kind of quiet and always said things that were sort of strange when he did speak. But I got to know the place pretty well, because I hung out there with my two buddies Jay Sawyer and Fred White. The three of us were in the sixth grade together at Martin's Elementary School, and we used to talk to Jim as much as we could. It wasn't just because he was from another country, although that alone would have been enough to keep us bugging him with questions all day long. No, it was because he was strange in some other way. Not a bad kind of strange, just strange. He would say things to me like, "Were you not a Butterfly?" That's the way he talked. He had a British accent because, even though he was born in Japan, he grew up in England. He said he went to some place called Exeter he claimed he learned to speak "many languages" even though he only ever spoke in English. Jay and Fred just thought he was peculiar. They usually didn't hang out long, and eventually they stopped coming with me at all. When I told them I was going to Jim's they would just say he was a crazy foreigner and that they'd much rather go fishing. But I liked Jim, so I hung out at his place as much as I could.

I asked him about that "many languages" thing once. I said, "Jim, how come you say you learned all those languages when all I ever hear you speak is English?" And this is what I mean by his being strange, because he said, "English is the language of the tongue which I did learn. But are there not many languages which are not spoken?" And even though I really couldn't think of one, he would always stop like that till I answered him. So I said, "Well, I guess so. Ma always said the birds could talk to each other; that's why they sing." And then he said, "Right she is, my friend. But that too is a language of the tongue. The kinds of languages I'm talking about are things like body language." And then he stopped again, just stood there smiling at me, and waited for that one to sink in.

Well, to be honest, I always thought Jim was a little on the light side, if you get it. So sometimes I just said things like, "Oh yeah, I see, Jim," and shook my head and maybe laughed a

little. But this time I was really caught. So I said, "Body language? You mean like sign language? Like for deaf folks?" And then Jim started howling with laughter and seemed like he was going to fall down he was laughing so hard. And he said, "A quick one you are, Butterfly, but that's not what I mean. I mean the things people say by the way they move their bodies." Then I guess I looked at him kind of funny, because he got all serious, and he pulled up a chair next to where I was sitting and he said, "Now Butterfly, when I pulled the chair up next to you just now, what did you think?" And so I said I thought he was going to tell me something serious. Then he smiled and said, "Very good. But why did you think I was going to tell you something serious? I could have been going to tell you a joke." Then it hit me, and I told him it was because he had this real serious look on his face. I made a serious face like he had to show him what I meant, and he must of thought this was funny because he started howling and laughing again.

Jim had a great sense of humor. He used to start howling sometimes so hard I thought he was going to cry. When he finally stopped laughing, he said, "That's right Butterfly. I think you've got it. People talk with their bodies. You knew I was going to tell you something because I pulled up the chair, and you knew it was going to be something serious because of the expression on my face. See, I said all that without a word. And there're other languages too. Sometimes people can't find words for what they want to say, so they use other languages." Then he stood up and just looked at me with a smile on his face as if he was letting all this sink in. I have to admit it was a lot to think about. I started to wonder if people could go through their whole lives without ever saying anything, except with their bodies. And then I asked Jim what other languages he knew. But he said, "Some other time, Butterfly. I've got to make the soup for tonight's dinner." And then I asked him, for about the tenth time, why he always called me Butterfly. "Someday I'll explain it all to you, Butterfly," which is what he always said when I asked him. Then he handed me one of his famous walnut cookies which was my message to get going. So I took my cookie and went to find Jay and Fred.

That's how my talks with Jim went. After a while I learned some more about him. He told me about growing up in England with his parents and grandfather. His father had been from India. When his father was a young man he moved to Japan to work for the British embassy there. He had married Jim's mother, who was Japanese, and so Jim was born in Japan. Just before the big war broke out, when Jim was two, his father was recalled to England.

Jim's family, along with his mother's father, moved to England, and that's where Jim went to school until he moved to America and opened his place in Hawthorne. I asked Jim why he opened a cafe in Hawthorne of all places, instead of the city. He said he came to Hawthorne because that's where he was supposed to be. That was the kind of strange answer he always gave.

My Pa, Ma, and I used to eat at Jim's every Friday night. My Pa was really fond of Jim back then. Pa would always leave a big tip and say things like, "Jim, you're the only piece of culture this area's ever likely to see."

My Pa grew up in South Carolina and, like the rest of his family, he had a big build. Hell, my old man was huge. Pa had a full beard and, like Jim, he liked to laugh a lot. He had his serious moments too. If anyone ever brought up politics he would get real serious. One time he

got into an argument with Fred White's dad about Roosevelt. I never did find out what it was they were actually arguing about, but my Pa got so mad he almost hit Fred White's dad right in the face. Fred White's dad weighed about a hundred pounds, and he was always sickly. If Pa had really hit him Pa would have laid him out. It would have been a mess. But Ma, who was about the only one who could calm Pa down when he got into one of his political tirades, she grabbed Pa by the arm before he could hit Fred White's dad, and she said, "Pa, come on now. You don't want things to get messy." Sure enough Pa calmed down and, before you knew it, he had his arm around Fred White's dad, and they were acting just like old friends. Fred White's dad never did bring up politics around Pa again. Jim never liked to talk about things like that either. Pa would say things to Jim like, "Jim, what do you think of that Roosevelt? Great President, isn't he?" But Jim would always just laugh and say, "Yes sir, he's real smart, but I would guess that he can't make a Good Karma Soup." And then Pa would laugh as if that were the funniest thing he ever heard.

Pa never ate any soup at Jim's. He said he didn't like soup that much. No, Pa always went straight for the ribs. That's all he ever ordered- ribs in some kind of orange sauce Jim made. Pa always pushed the sauce off, and, eventually, Jim stopped offering Pa any soup, and he started making Pa's ribs without the sauce.

I never use to have the soup either, not because I didn't like it, I'm sure I would have because it had big chunks of potatoes and some kind of fish nobody could ever place. I always did like seafood, and I've always been fine with potatoes, so like I said, I'm sure I would have liked his soup. But I had this nasal problem, and anytime I ate soup it made my nose run, so Ma never let me order the soup which I guess was all for the best; nobody wants their nose running all over the place while other people are trying to eat. Anyway, I almost always had the ribs, with the sauce.

A lot of other people ate at Jim's too. Like I said, it was kind of prestigious. It got to be a regular Friday night thing. People would play games, and the adults would talk about whatever, the men usually gathering around one table, and the women around another playing bridge and trying to figure out what went into Jim's soup that made it so good. They usually gave up after a while and called Jim over to ask him, but all he ever said was in his soup was a lot of good karma. Nobody knew what good karma was or even some low grade karma, so the ladies never could find it at the grocer's. Mrs. Tuttle even went into the city one Saturday and nobody at the grocer's there had any good karma either.

Finally, after a couple months, nobody asked Jim about his soup anymore; they just ate it. Mrs. Street, who was the fattest woman in Hawthorne, sometimes had two bowls. Things were pretty good for everybody back in those early days at Jim's as I remember it. Mr. and Mrs. Belcher, who everyone said had been trying to have a baby for two years, finally had one in the Spring of 1940. Johnny Grenshaw, who was smart as a two headed owl, finally got enough money together to go to some uppity school in Vermont which he was always talking about. Ben, who was sort of a friend of mine except nobody liked to hang out with him much on account of he had this really bad case of acne, his face all cleared up and when he went to his senior dance with Sally Westfield, who was the prettiest girl around, he got all popular. Even Mrs. Street

started to loose some weight. Yeah everybody was real happy, at least that's how I remember it. I think, honestly, that those days back at Jim's were the best days I've ever seen.

In the summer of 1941, I guess, is when things started to get bad. It basically happened like this. One day I was swimming with Ben, who, like I said, was all cleared up and popular with the girls by now. Anyway, Ben was a great swimmer, and I always had this sort of fear of swimming, but I knew that as long as Ben was with me, I'd be okay. We were swimming at Wilson's point, which is kind of deep, when along comes Jay Sawyer. Now, Jay has always been a strange one and, anyway, he still didn't like Ben very much on account of the fact that Jay had always had this thing for Sally Westfield, and even though she told him lots of times that she didn't like him like that, he still asked her to his senior dance. Well, I guess Sally kind of felt sorry for him or something because she told him she would think about it. But then, like I told you, Ben asked Sally to the dance also, and she went with him. So Jay had been ticked off at Ben for a while now. He just stood up on the pier watching us for a minute, then he started picking up rocks and throwing them toward us like he was trying to skip stones, only the rocks he was throwing were too big for skipping.

Ben and I kept hollering at him, telling him to stop. But Jay kept right on throwing stones at us, and they were coming closer and closer. I got real upset about it and told Ben I was going in, but as I got in closer top the pier the stones came even closer. Finally, I guess Ben got fed up with it. He told me not to worry and to tread water for a minute while he went in to get Jay off our backs. As Ben was swimming in, Jay walloped him real hard. I could hear the rock hit Ben's head. Then Ben sank under water all of a sudden. I started hollering his name figuring he was just trying to swim in under water. Ben was a real good swimmer, and he could hold his breath for a long time. I guess that's what Jay thought too because he was just standing there with another rock in his hand like he was waiting for Ben to come up so he could hit him again. I started hollering Ben's name, and even after a few minutes I was still waiting for him to come up somewhere. Then Jay took off running, and I knew something was really wrong. I got real scared and kept hollering Ben's name even louder. I swam over to where he went under, but I couldn't find him. I swam to the pier faster than I ever had before and ran all the way home. I came bawling up to my house and told my Pa what happened. He went down to the point with a couple men. I waited on the porch with Ma till about three hours later I saw my Pa coming up the street with a couple other men. They looked real tired and wet, and they walked with their heads down not saying a word to one another. My Pa just looked at me when he got up to the porch, and I knew Ben was dead.

They never did a thing to Jay Sawyer even though I told them how he was throwing stones at us. They said it was just an unfortunate accident. That night I went up to Jim's and told him what happened. He could see I was all bent out of shape about it, and he sat me down with a couple of cookies and started to talk all serious.

"Sometimes, things like this happen." Jim said. And then I started to cry a little even though I knew I wasn't supposed to, and Jim got all sad. He sat with me for a while real quiet. We just sat there, and after a while he said, "Butterfly, why don't you come around tomorrow, and we'll see what I can cook up for you." I didn't see what good food would do for me, but I nodded my head and went on my way.

The next day, when I went to Jim's, he was waiting for me by the door. I could see we weren't going to eat anything because he had some boots on and he was carrying two walking sticks. He gave one of the sticks to me, and we started walking down towards the point. I told Jim I didn't much feel like going to the point, but he just smiled at me and said, "We're not going to the point. We're going to cut into the woods before we get there." Anyway, all this seemed real strange to me, but I didn't have anything better to do, and I was still kind of upset about Ben, so I just followed along.

When we got into the woods Jim sat down under an oak tree and motioned for me to do the same. For a while we just sat there real quiet. Jim had this big smile on his face and was looking up at the tree like he saw a squirrel or something. I started looking up at the tree too, but I didn't see anything. Just as I was getting ready to ask Jim what he was looking at he started talking.

"Butterfly, do you see this tree?"

"Yeah, I see it," I said, wondering how I couldn't see it since all we were doing was looking at it.

"What do you see, Butterfly?" I just sat there for a minute wondering if maybe Jim wasn't a little crazy after all. Then I thought maybe he just didn't know what kind of tree it was.

"I see an oak tree." I said, feeling kind of stupid about pointing out the obvious to a man who was supposed to have gone to college.

"Is that all you see?"

"Well, I guess there's some leaves on the tree."

"Ah, yes, those leaves." And then I was sure he had lost it, but since I kind of liked Jim, and, as I said, I had nothing better to do, I decided to just sit this one through. Then he said, "What else do you see?"

"I see branches and a trunk."

"Very good, Butterfly. I see something else too. Do you see it?" I looked real hard, but I couldn't see anything else really.

"No, I don't see anything else, Jim."

"Ah, well, I'll show you." Then he laid down on the ground and was real quiet for a while. I swear I thought he had fallen asleep or something, and a nap didn't sound like a bad idea, so I laid down too. Then he said, "You see, Butterfly, the tree is like the universe. The tree is all life. It is made up of all things and it has the potential to become all things. The leaves are like people's souls. There are more than we can count. The leaves grow bigger, spread out, then get

yellow and fall off to the ground. All the leaves are connected to all the other leaves by branches. Do you see?"

I honestly did think what he was saying was interesting, but I wasn't sure I really understood.

"All the leaves, like all people, are connected. We all live our lives and then grow old and fall into the earth. But we are all part of the same tree. When we die, like the leaves, we make the soil rich so that other trees can grow and bring forth other leaves which in turn live their lives and die and then bring forth other springtimes. Do you see?"

"I think so." And I really did, I think, get what he was saying.

"Every tree you see has been another tree before, and will be another tree again. When it has lived its years it too will fall to the ground and decay. You see, Butterfly, we don't live single lives, and we don't inhabit just one world. We live as many lives as there are leaves in a forest and then as many more again. There are many worlds waiting for this one to live its years and give them the soil they need to form new worlds. And each leaf, no matter how small, no matter how brief its life, is connected to the leaves of the whole tree, and to all the other leaves that will ever be."

Then Jim stopped like he was giving me time to think about it all. After a while we got up and started walking back to Hawthorne. When we got back to Jim's place he looked at me and smiled his usual smile. He told me I could keep the walking stick I had been using in case I ever wanted to go on a walk when he wasn't around. Then he pulled a cookie out of his pocket, and I said thank you. I meant thanks not only for the cookie, but also for hanging out with me, but I don't know if Jim knew that. He went inside and I went back home thinking about the things Jim had said. I really didn't know what to make of it all, but it sounded nice, and it made me feel a little better about Ben.

A couple of weeks later I met up with Jim again and we walked together out toward the point. This time we went all the way out to the swimming area where everything happened with Ben. I stopped before I got close to the water, and I told Jim I didn't feel like getting any closer. I was feeling real uptight about the water and all. But Jim took my hand and told me everything would be okay and he wouldn't let me fall in. So I walked closer to the water where there was a little hill that sloped down toward the pier. Jim started pointing at something, and at first I didn't see it, but then I noticed a little flower growing up from the rocky area near the water. It was bright purple and had sprung up between a couple pieces of granite. I told Jim I had never seen a flower so close to the water where the rocks were, and he nodded his head a little. Then he said, "If you can understand why that flower is there, it will change how you look at things." I wasn't sure what he meant, but it sure did seem like a miracle that a flower had sprung up in all those rocks. We walked back to town not saying a word. I really didn't have anything to say, and Jim was the kind of person you could spend time with without feeling like you had to be saying something. You could think with him, if you know what I mean. When we got back to town Jim stopped for a minute and said, "Butterfly, I want you to remember that everything will be okay. No matter where I am I will always think of you and wish you well."

This kind of bothered me because I had started to really like Jim, so I said, "What do you mean? Are you going somewhere, Jim?" I guess he could see I was getting kind of upset because he started smiling at me like he always did when he was getting ready to give me a cookie.

"I am always going somewhere, Butterfly."

"Where are you going? I didn't know you were going somewhere."

"I don't know where I'm going; I just know I'm going."

"When?" I asked.

"Not too soon, Butterfly, but someday." Well, I thought, at least it wasn't soon. Then I thought maybe Jim was just joking around or trying to teach me something like with the tree.

A few months went by, and I was hanging out at Jim's more than ever. I was back in school, but when I wasn't in school, I was with Jim. It got to where he would even let me watch the place for him while he ran down to the grocer's for something. Then, in the first week of December of that year, something terrible happened.

I was sitting in Jim's talking with him about whether or not the Mets would ever make the World Series when in rushes my father all of a sudden with a real angry look on his face. He just stood there for a moment looking at the both of us, then he said, "The Japs bombed Pearl Harbor."

The only thing I could think of to say was, "What's Pearl Harbor?" My father said I should get on home, and I looked up at Jim. He had this real troubled look on his face. I went on out, but my father stayed behind for a minute. I knew he and Jim were talking about something, but it wasn't until the next day that I found out what it was.

That night the Mckenzie's and the Whites came over, and all the adults sat around the radio. There were all kinds of people saying things about Hawaii and how the Japs bombed us and killed all these men. It all sounded pretty messy to me. Then the president came on and everybody got real quiet. he said that the US was declaring war on Japan. When he finished everyone started yelling and hollering, and the men kept saying how they wished they were young enough to join up and fight. Then they started talking about Jim and how he was a Jap and how they should kick him out of town. I felt real worried and decided I should just go up to bed. I figured all this would wash out by morning.

The next morning Pa was already gone, and Ma said I should get straight to school and not stop by Jim's on the way home. On the way to school I noticed that nearly every man in Hawthorne and even some of the wives were out in front of Jim's place carrying on about something. They were saying that they wanted Jim out of town, and they weren't going to tolerate any Japs around. I ran over to listen, but my Pa saw me and got real angry. He told me to

get off to school and to not even think about coming by Jim's after I got out. I couldn't understand what all the uproar was about. Jim didn't have anything to do with Pearl Harbor.

When I came home from school that day Jim was gone. Nobody knew where he went, and nobody but me even asked. The whole area was busy with talk of fighting the Japs. Jay Sawyer and Fred White signed up in the army as soon as they were old enough. I decided to wait until I was drafted even though I knew my father thought I was a baby for not volunteering. As it turns out I was never drafted. I guess it's a good thing I wasn't. Jay Sawyer got killed almost right away and Fred White came back with a lot of horror stories. It was a busy time. The whole country was about fighting this war. I often thought about Jim after he left, but eventually I got so wrapped up, like everybody else, in the war that I began to think about him less and less. Sometimes I would take the walking stick he gave me and wander off into the woods. It wasn't the same without him though.

My life since those days, I have to say, has not been good. I finished school just after the war was over. I got married to Mary Tuttle when I was just nineteen, and that didn't work. We stretched things out for fourteen years. I guess we stuck together mainly for our son, John, though after a while not even that could keep us from fighting so much. Eventually we separated and got divorced. The government did end up buying Martin's Plantation during the first year of the war. They called the airport Martin Marrietta. It was the only place around to get a decent job, and most people in Hawthorne worked there. Lots of new people started coming into the area. They built a big shopping center right in the middle of town and a parking lot is now there where Jim's place used to be. I haven't really done much with myself these past thirty years, and I can't remember the last time I was really happy. Last week I got laid off from Martin's.

This all brings me to what happened the last time I saw Jim, which was only a few days ago. I hadn't seen him once since that night he and I were debating about the Mets, and, in fact, I pretty much had forgotten all about him. I was down town at the unemployment office. When I left I was walking up Mulberry St. and who should I see walking my way but Jim Singh looking just the way he had thirty years before. I yelled his name, and he looked up at me with that old smile of his just like he knew it was going to be me.

"Hello, Butterfly," he said in a perfectly unexcited voice.

"Hey Jim!" I replied, not knowing whether to shake his hand or not. I felt very happy at that moment, as happy as I can ever remember being. We talked for a few minutes, and then he invited me to have lunch at his cafe. The cafe was just like the one he had in Hawthorne, and for a minute I thought I was actually stepping back in time. We sat down and had some coffee.

"So what have you been doing with yourself, Butterfly?"

"Not much." I tried to say this cheerfully, but I think Jim could see right through that. He got this real serious look on his face just like he used to.

"Has life not been good?" And then I thought I was going to break down and cry right there in front of him. I don't know what came over me or why the things that had happened over

the past thirty years seemed like they were coming back to me all at once. I think it might have been hearing Jim call me Butterfly that made me wish for those good old days back when I was a kid in his cafe. I started telling Jim all about it. I told him about Mary and how we had tried to make things work. I told him about my horrible job on the assembly line and about how I was laid off. I told him about how I was afraid to go to sleep sometimes at night and about how my hair was falling out. And I told him about everything I could think of. I must have been talking for about two hours and all the while Jim just sat there listening quietly. Then when I finished I think I may have actually been crying. I put my head in my hands, and then Jim began talking.

"Your life is not over, Butterfly. You have neglected your mind and your spirit and it is just that your body has given way. You must think about things. Not just about jobs and wives, but about flowers and trees. You must allow yourself to imagine a better life, only then will find you what you are looking for. Remember those old lessons I taught you? They are still inside your head. They are still true."

"You mean about the tree?"

"Yes, the tree and the other things which you learned. You will remember them if you sit quietly and free your mind of all the mess of the last thirty years. Those days when you were happy will come back to you and seem as real as when you first experienced them. All our days are always with us. You need only imagine it to be so." I didn't want to say anything. I just wanted Jim to keep talking. His words always had a way of making me feel as if I could do anything, and I wanted to feel like that for as long as possible. But he didn't say anymore. Instead, he walked into the kitchen and came back out with a bowl of soup. "Here you are, Butterfly. Have some Good Karma Soup."

"I never did get a chance to try this." I said.

"Yes, well, now you can." And it was the best soup I ever had. I ended up eating three bowls full, as Jim and I talked for a couple more hours. After a while I felt as if I could almost forget about all those years and really start things over. I thought about maybe calling Mary up; I really did love her after all. I started thinking about writing. I had always liked writing when I was in school. Anyway, I was out of a job and had six months of severance pay coming. I was feeling good about everything, and that's when I decided to write this about Jim. Then, just like when I was a kid, he handed me a couple walnut cookies, and I went home.