

tumor the pathology report called “exuberant” in its growth—he still ended up winning more money at poker than he lost.

Of course, the tool he used most to hold back his fear and his despair was his sense of humor. None of us present will forget the sight of him lying on the hospital gurney about to be wheeled into the operating room. He had on the sickly mint green hospital gown, the hair net, and a head with magic marker lines to aid the surgeon. He showed absolutely no anxiety. Instead, he began singing in an almost preternaturally flat voice a song from *The Mikado*: “Defer, defer to the Lord High Executioner!” Not one line, not one round of the chorus, but many, many rounds.

It was surreal; it was a beautiful moment, and it was a gift to us. It did not delude any of us into thinking our Jimmy would come back from the operating room unscathed and non-malignant, but it did make me feel that we would make it through the dark night of his illness with his dignity, and mine, intact.

When people called Jimmy in the last month of his life, he was mostly paralyzed; he was incontinent; he was struggling to speak. They would ask him how he was doing. He would respond in his slowed down voice: “I’m DYING (pause, pause, pause—he always had exquisite timing)—but I feel fine.” I could visualize his friends on the other end of the line, making that hard, hard call to the dying man they loved, and being so taken aback—and then relieved—to get that response. Pure Jimmy. Somehow both unsettling and reassuring all at once. (And totally calculated on his part—he said to me as an aside once: “That should make them relax some.”)

The impact Jimmy had on the world around him is often measured by his ideas, his sane analysis of history and politics in a seemingly insane world. He did have an impact, more than most of us dream of having. But those of us who knew him well knew that his heart was as big as his mind. It was his heart that drove his thirst for justice; it was his heart that opened him up to people beyond the privileged circumstances he was born into; it was his heart that made him wise, instead of just smart. I found it fitting that the day before he died, the hospice nurse said, “His heart is beating strong.”

**Beth Maschinot** and James Weinstein were partners for 22 years. She is a grant writer and program evaluator for nonprofits in Chicago.

## Creature Comforts

I was the managing editor of *In These Times* in the early ’80s, when the exhilaration of the antiwar movement had evaporated and the left was trying to find its way forward in the dead air of the disco era. Surely others will have plenty to say about Jimmy’s crucial role in keeping the left alive through those years. He did it with the force of his intellect and with his ferocious dedication to the paper (which would suspend the payroll at least once a year and send us all down to the unemployment office to collect a stipend).

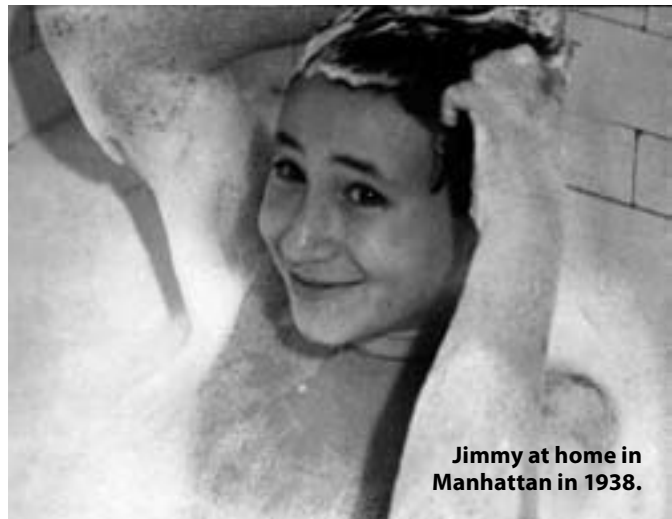
But he also did it indirectly, by showing people like me that we could move into the adult world without forsaking our ideals. It was the dawn of the “yuppie” era. Most of the paper’s staff were just entering their 30s and considering, for the first time, the desirability of a car that started every morning and an apartment without six roommates—not to mention children, a mortgage and job benefits. But the New Left was still the thrall of severe, student movement values, which declared that anything more than a mattress on the floor was suspect and out of bounds.

Jimmy had no trouble reconciling creature comforts with good politics. One day, when a staff member was being attacked for buying a color TV, Jimmy stepped in to say that his buddy Marty Sklar had once been criticized for the same thing. Marty’s defense, which Jimmy quoted with obvious approval, was that “nothing is too good for the working class.”

**Lee Aitken**, a former managing editor of *In These Times* and, later, a former senior editor of *Time* magazine, lives in Paris.

## Look, It’s a Better World

The main thing I remember is how funny Jimmy was, his weakness for dumb puns and wordplay. Right now, only two come to mind: Our all-purpose Chicago winter joke, “Many are cold, few are frozen,” and then a darker pun he made often with me: He would insist he wasn’t my “mentor,” he was my “tormentor.” Which is funny, but brings up one of his many ambivalences—about becoming the older generation, the mentor, the one in charge.



Jimmy at home in Manhattan in 1938.

COURTESY OF BETH MASCHINOT

He was ambivalent about a lot having to do with his role at *In These Times*—fundraising, balancing the budget, managing, giving people bad news—but he was in fact my mentor, and I benefited greatly.

Though he famously started the magazine in Chicago, Jimmy indulged me when I wanted to leave, letting me set up *ITT*’s first California Bureau in Oakland 20 years ago, instead of in Los Angeles, where the hard-nosed, and probably correct, John Judis (another mentor) thought I should have been based. Jimmy argued that the Bay Area was important for cultivating funders and subscribers on the local left. But my first story mainly made us enemies: It was supposed to be about the grand new multiracial coalition coming together behind lefty Oakland City Council member Wilson Riles Jr., which was going to sweep business-oriented Mayor Lionel Wilson out of office. Except, of course, it didn’t—the coalition was run by white lefty sectarians, riven by factionalism, and largely irrelevant to the city’s black majority, which still venerated its first African American mayor. When I turned in a story that said just that, I could hear Jimmy sigh over the phone, imagining the lost subscribers—but he praised my reporting and didn’t change a word. Now, at *Salon*, I think about Jimmy every time we run a story debunking the myth that Bush stole the 2004 election, and I field the angry cancel-my-subscription letters.

Jimmy felt hurt when I left *ITT* after three years, and we didn’t see each other for a while. But when we reconnected much had changed. He’d made peace with being an old guy, a dad, a granddad, a husband and a mentor, too. He said he was proud of me, and accepted that with my work at

*Salon* I'd extended his reach, not severed the connection. And even as we headed into the second Bush term, when I interviewed him for *Salon* about *The Long Detour*, he was calling himself "a pathological optimist" and reminding me how much things had changed in his lifetime, and how much change was still possible: "You hear people in different movements saying how bad things are. 'We haven't won anything,' but that's crazy. Look at gays—look at television, where you have shows like 'Will and Grace' or the gay guys who make over the straight guys. Come on, look, it's a different world, it's a better world." He helped make it one, and I'm grateful to him.

**Joan Walsh**, a former staff writer of *In These Times*, is the editor of *Salon*.

## A Generous Teacher

There are many measures of the man, but one that I have come to believe in over time is "generosity." More than anyone I've known, Jim gave meaning to that word.

Early in my tenure as managing editor of *In These Times*, he'd hand me the keys to his beloved Honda Accord whenever he ventured out of Chicago. After I married, he once loaned us his family's Manhattan co-op with its grand view of Central Park and collection of Impressionist paintings. When I told him a few years ago how much I enjoyed sunsets on the Great Lakes, he insisted that my family borrow his and Beth's weekend getaway in Lakeside, Michigan. We obliged. Four times.

He was at his most generous after he'd prevailed at a poker game the previous night. I'd inquire the next day, "How did you do?" More often than not, he would respond with a sly smile, "I'm taking you to lunch today." This happened so frequently over the 12 years we worked together that I lost

count. Yet I have not lost sight of the abiding lesson that Jimmy taught by his example: Hold on tight to your ideals but share everything else, no strings attached, with those around you. I, and scores of Jimmy's other protégés, are indebted to our teacher.

**Sheryl Larson** was *In These Times* managing editor from 1982 to 1993.

## The Man Who Came to Dinner

When I started at *In These Times* as an intern in 1989, I wasn't far removed from my Republican childhood in upstate New York. What little I knew of the left I'd learned in a Marxist Thought class in college. My grade, a D-minus, was well deserved.

I was not a natural fit for a magazine edited by James Weinstein. Yet Jimmy welcomed me into *ITT*'s editorial offices. And when I began to go broke as an unpaid intern, he and Beth Maschinot let me live in their basement for free. It was a temporary arrangement that lasted seven years. Before long, I was a squatter at their kitchen table as well.

Raised on a diet of TV dinners and Potato Buds, I initially felt as out of place at Jimmy's table as I had at his magazine. For Jimmy was a wonderful cook. Fortunately, his cooking—like his politics—was totally unpretentious. Soon, I was addicted to his ceviche, and I ate it and many other dishes in quantities that were simply scandalous.

Jimmy proved as generous with his time as he did with his food. Plate in hand, I'd follow him into his study, where he'd pull a book from the shelves; not to score a scholarly point, but to help a kid whose politics were rooted in the rocky soil of the '80s understand how rich the legacy of the American left really was—to

help me see that the socialist mayors of Milwaukee and a hundred other U.S. towns had forged a politics as fully American as Ronald Reagan's, and far more serious about the ideals of liberty and justice.

This June, when I visited Jimmy for the last time, I was once again invited to raid the family refrigerator. As in the old days, I speedily devoured a bunch of Jimmy's favorite dishes. I cannot say that I took the time to savor the meals.

I sometimes fear that Jimmy's fine food was wasted on me. The lessons I learned at his table, however, will sustain me the rest of my life.

**Jim McNeill**, a former managing editor of *In These Times* and former editor of *The Racine Laborer*, works for unions and writes in *Washington, D.C.*

## Hope and Politics

Jimmy understood people. When he decided to talk me into coming from Durham, N.C., to become the culture editor in 1997, he quickly figured out that the road to my heart was through my stomach. After years in the South, I missed the variety of people and foods of my hometown, Chicago. So when I flew up there to talk about the job, he took me for Thai, then Cuban, and for the next meal gave me a choice of seven ethnic groups. On the way to *ITT*, he pointed out how the signs suddenly changed from all Polish to all Spanish. "It's the Polish-Mexican border," he said.

For almost a year, I commuted from North Carolina, spending a week a month in Chicago, staying with Jimmy and Beth. They were good to me, generous. They fed me, made me feel at home, and we told each other our stories. Jimmy told of working in factories, joining the Communist Party, driving Julius Rosenberg, of his poker games, of starting *ITT*. He had more



Poker was an early and abiding love.

COURTESY OF BETH MASCHINOT