

## A Memory

Jim Beech was my brother. Some form of destiny made this so. We first met in the fall semester of 1967 at Jamestown College in a small town in North Dakota. He was from Virginia and I was from California. Like many of the other out-of-region freshmen recruits to JC, neither of us had been to JC previously. We went there sight-unseen and found each other. And in the four years there, we found ourselves, and we found ever-lasting friendships.

It is strange how such a short four years can have such an indelible effect on our outlook and personality over a lifetime that would follow. Perhaps it was our age: we were young and impressionable; perhaps it was the pressures of college life: we shared courses, papers, finals; perhaps it was having to live in close quarters in a strange (to us) place. And it is likely all of the above.

But it was also the bonds of fellowship that we found in like-minded people. I think we were lucky to find ourselves among a diverse group: farm kids from the Dakotas, Minnesota and Montana; suburban kids from Maryland, Virginia, the Twin Cities, and California; city kids from New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. We were bound by one thing: we had opted for the small college experience in (very) rural America.

Photo: "Chopper" Lambert  
(Redfield, SD), Jim, Art Martinez  
(East LA), Willie Mendoza  
(Pittsburgh, CA)



And we made the most of that experience. We found many ways to survive and thrive. Jim and I and our friends found it through Sigma Gamma Chi fraternity. As freshmen we latched on to this group who put service ahead of self. In the four years we were involved in Sigma, it became our mission to expand the service, but also to make it fun. One highlight was the Marathon Basketball game that we used to raise money for some cause that I would have to look up to remember. No sleep and playing against teams that actually wanted to beat us, even after we had been without sleep for 36 hours, created a bond among us. Jim was our Grand Master at that time.

However, when I think about our time at JC what brings the biggest smile to my face are the spring road trips we took. The first was in 1969 when we (Jim, me, Gary

Purath, Mark Very, Art Martinez, and Jim Olson) took Gary Purath's 1959 (or so) Dodge for a trip to California.



Photo: Front: Gary Purath, Art Martinez; Back: Jim Beech, Mark Very, Jim Olson, Jack Suyderhoud

We left school a day before the start of Spring Break by skipping out on an English midterm given by the great Marion Jackson. We told her we had to leave early because our driver had to do so. That was not really the case; we just did not want to take the midterm at that time. The only one NOT a party to the subterfuge was Jim who could not tell a lie if he were forced to.

Unfortunately, somehow Marion found out that Jim was in our group. It was awkward when we returned from that trip. The trip started in a blizzard where we had to drive with the door open to get from Jamestown to Bismarck on I-94. We toured Salt Lake City, San Francisco, the California coast, LA and Disneyland, and even crossed into Mexico. We eventually ended up playing a drunken football game in the Arizona desert with Tijuana rum smuggled across the border. We were fortunate the border patrol agent didn't ask Jim if we had any contraband, because he would have told the truth. And, only Jim was sober and able to drive us out of the desert.

Jim was our moral compass. Given the genuine lack of any such thing by the rest of us, this was very important. He probably saved our lives (and that of innocent bystanders) any number of times.

We called Jim, "Slick". I don't know where that name came from. Maybe it was because he was generally more aware of and concerned about his appearance than the rest of us. We did many things with no good reasons. That is a blessing of youth.

Our lives intersected for four short years at JC and then occasionally thereafter. But every meeting after those four years was like picking up where we had left off. In those many years Jim found Pat and they have a depth of relationship that was and is inspiring. I'm happy for Jim that he found his soul mate, and I mourn for Pat that it could not last longer.

The last time I saw Jim was in Fargo last July. Four of us from the 1969 California trip were there: Jim, Gary, Mark, and me. We sat around and chatted with the comfort of familiarity that 40+ years could not diminish. In a sense, it was an affirmation of our friendships that has formed the basis of my life.

I am truly saddened by Jim's death but am happy that his suffering is over. I'm sure that Pat will take comfort in having had Jim's love, friendship, and companionship. I know that Jim would have wanted her to celebrate his life and to move on with hers.

I am proud to have had Jim as a friend and brother.

Jack Suyderhoud