

## **James Goode Ince**

*A reflection written by Bronson Davis*

One of the knocks on DePauw in the sixties was that it was a white bread school with all of us coming from similar ethnic and racial backgrounds. That always seemed a superficial view. Diversity comes in a variety of forms. My experience was that I met any number of people who may have shared my skin color, but who came from quite different backgrounds. My encounters with them formed a valuable part of my education. The best example of this was James Ince.

Jim had a blue blood background in that his father ran a successful Wall Street brokerage firm. Jim lived in a swish house in Bronxville, New York, and he was educated at Deerfield Academy. In school, he was voted by his classmates "most likely to succeed on Wall Street," an irony in view of his later politics. For whatever reason, his counselors at Deerfield didn't consider him likely to succeed in college. And so rather than attend an Ivy League school like many of his fellow students, he matriculated to DePauw, a school he had never seen.

His choice proved to be providential. A sociology course intrigued him, and John Reiling and other members of the sociology department took an interest in Jim. He flourished, not only in sociology, but in all of his work. He was to graduate from DePauw and begin a Ph.D. program in sociology at the University of Pittsburgh.

I had a nodding acquaintanceship with Jim because we both studied in the library, and I happened to run into him at the very beginning of the second semester of my junior year. I was at the nadir of my college experience; nothing seemed to be working. I had a disappointing fall on the football field, my grades were dismal, my love life was crumbling and I had no idea what the future held for me. I was seriously considering dropping out of school until I visited my draft board. I determined I would be in Army green by the end of spring should I choose to walk away from my educational deferment.

Jim sensed my desperation and we had a long talk. At the end, he mentioned there was a room available on the second floor of the house where he lived on Seminary. Perhaps a change of venue would alter my fortunes. So began my friendship with James Goode Ince.

At a time when most of us never looked at a newspaper, Jim went through five every day in the library. I quickly learned that if I had an opinion, I better be able to back it up, as he challenged a good bit of what I believed. There were times when I felt we were locked in one long, continually changing bull session on Vietnam, civil rights, American politics, and religion. Our favorite was whether equality or liberty was more important in a political culture. You name it, we debated it. He could be exasperating, but never boring.

Jim was into the social theory phase of his education in sociology, liked to think of himself as a socialist and was very critical of America. He went to Mississippi in the summer of 1964. He did walk the walk.

Jim had eight yellow button-down shirts, probably five pair of olive chino pants, and hush puppies: his uniform. He could throw on a tweed jacket and he had a modest coat. He thought making clothing choices in the morning was too much vanity.

He always had his record player going in his room, running with either classical or folk music. He introduced me to Tom Rush, Buffy Saint Marie, Bob Dylan, Phil Ochs, Odetta and many more who would become important in the Sixties. When we drove to New York for our 1965 semester break—he owned a Volkswagen parked in a garage five blocks off campus—he took me to see my first opera as well as many of the haunts of the rising class of folksingers.

Jim saved me again in my final semester at DePauw. I was taking five major courses to complete my 124 hours including German, a Russian history seminar, a history of western philosophy and two other challenging subjects. Sensing I was drowning, he suggested I quit my part-time jobs and he would cover my housing and food expenses. And in a final charitable gesture, Jim on his way out of town after commencement, stopped at the university administrative offices and left anonymous \$1,000 gifts for Dr. Reiling and another one of his professors.

The one bizarre exception to his leftist and generous ways in those days was his passion for thoroughbreds. He carefully studied his copies of "Blood Horse" magazine, and had an amazing knowledge of a world I never knew existed. He once told me he thought he could be happy cleaning out the stalls of horses. He finally broke down in graduate school and talked his father into splitting the cost of purchasing a colt, and when I was in Washington D.C. studying Amharic for the U.S. Army, he suggested I accompany him on a trip down to Camden, South Carolina to watch "Super Sleuth" go through his winter workouts prior to his two-year-old season. He said he didn't care if the horse ever won a race, he just liked being in the game. I tried to follow the horse through the next year, and I think he fulfilled Jim's low expectations.

I visited him once in Pittsburgh prior to my going overseas to fight the Vietnam War from the mountains of Ethiopia. It was the last time I saw him. He said he was not one to maintain connections. Three years later when I returned to the U.S. I had a family and was at a different place. I wish I had reached out to him, but we lost track of each other. I used to search books on the sociology profession and lists of professors, but I never found him. I was then shocked to learn he had died on December 20, 1995.

Later I tracked down his wife, and was sad to learn he had never finished his Ph.D. I thought he would have been an excellent teacher, but she said he had decided

it wasn't what he wanted to do. Jim worked in the housing authority in New York City. He had two children, but he somehow lost his way, according to his wife, began drinking too much and this led to his early death. I couldn't help but regret that I never reached out to him. Who knows, perhaps I could have done for him what he did for me. On this our 50<sup>th</sup> reunion, I will raise a glass to Jim, who was an unforgettable, incredibly broadening part of my DePauw experience.