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From: Dr. Death AKA **John Watson, former President CARE Canada; Adjunct Professor, University of Ottawa**; currently confined to a wheelchair in Goa, India

My Friend Jim

All friendships are sealed by joint experiences in certain luminous times and places and for Jim and I, that was Zimbabwe during the first years after independence. We learned our crafts there together; he in his first gig as a foreign correspondent, me as a budding development wallah. My work took me on long trips to remote areas, and Jim wanted to accompany me on these in order to gain a different perspective of Zimbabwe than the one he got from the politicians, diplomats, and other journalists in the capital.

But more than the trips, we just hit it off together. We played tennis almost every day after work on occasions when we were both in town. After the game and the inevitable sundowners at the club more often than not I would end up at his home where Joan, Paddy, and baby Ben provided the anchor around which Jim's life swayed. There we would talk endlessly about big things and small while Randy Newman or Billy Joel played in the background. At first, I was puzzled by Jim's obsession with these performers, but then I realized it was the writer in him. These guys were really storytellers above all, and Jim was always listening to the words as well as the music. When he said, "This is a great one, listen to this," you knew you were in for four minutes of silence, apart from the stereo, and that you would be tested on your comprehension afterwards. I have been re-listening to those songs in recent days, and I must admit, it has been tough.

Those were the days before the internet and skype, so we would often meet at the PTO, where I depended on the telex for communications with HQ, and where Travers picked up the brown envelopes sent out with his weekly clippings.

Anyone who thinks that Jim was a happy-go-lucky guy without a temper and moods was never with him when he ran through these clipping files. First, there was the anger at the replacement headlines that they were published under: "Look at this! The guy didn't even read my story." Secondly, woe to those who would edit Travers: "Idiots! They changed my hockey metaphor to a baseball one because it's summer back home. It's got nothing to do with baseball!"

But there was a good side to the clipping files too. Of course, Jim had to cover the "big news": wars, coups, disasters. Being a writer at heart as well as a journalist, he did not want to merely report events, but convey to Canadians why Africa was more than all the negative images and why its people were so remarkable. When he got the clipping files back, he found that these writing



pieces were almost never picked up by the large metropolitan papers; no surprise there! But he also found that the smaller town papers loved them. Whether it was true or not, it fixed in Travers' mind the idea that Canadians were decent and intelligent beings who gave balance to this country.

Jim used humour to make people feel better. For 31 years he called me Dr. Death because I have both a Ph.D. and a naturally pessimistic view of the world. It was his way of saying "Lighten up, Watson. Don't take yourself so seriously. It's hard on you." He also called me Dr. Death because we rode motorcycles together and it was a cool, motorcycle guy type of name.

Towards the end of my stay in Zimbabwe, we were on one such trip—one of the last we would have together. One night, we stepped outside for a break from the smoke, music, and general pandemonium of a wild party. In the early morning hours it was as quiet outside as it was noisy in; and there were our bikes. Mine was a hog; Travers' a smaller but lighter and faster road racer. There was no moon, but the Southern Cross and the strange stars of its hemisphere filled the sky. The road stretched out dead straight and level over the high veldt of Africa. We decided to go for a ride. It was warm, so we didn't go back for our jackets and helmets. We just cranked up our bikes, put on our high beams, and headed down the road.

It was a magical ride. The lines on the highway, still and solid white on the shoulder, and flickering yellow in the center. The bikes were loud, but in different ways; mine a low roar; Travers' a banshee scream. The stars still overhead, dark shapes on the veldt, trees or rocks, maybe an animal whipping by; and our terrified scanning of the edge of our high-beams for springbok. Jim always wanted to push the envelope on his racer. And that night he took it up to 100mph before I chickened out and fell back.

We turned around and agreed that all of this was a foolish adventure that could get us killed, so we started back to Bikita Mines, never taking the speed past 60mph, but we put out our headlights just to add a last thrill.

We didn't die that night. Instead, we made the kind of stupid guy memory that we would share for a lifetime.

We always wanted to do another motorcycle trip together but got caught up in careers and family. But whenever we got together we talked about that trip: where we would go, the bikes we would take, and the book Jim would write about it. No longer constrained by deadlines and current politics, he would write strictly as a labour of love about the places and people that we were passing.

Then a few years ago I bought my first big road bike in years, in fact Jim spotted it for me. But when I raised the trip again, he reluctantly told me his medical condition meant that he could no longer be certain of his balance on a two

wheeler. But still we talked about a trip; perhaps the grand canyon with me on the bike and with him in a small sports car. At our last dinner together with Joan and Rosanna, we were still trying. Maybe Jim and Joan could come out to Goa for a visit. By then the trip talk was not of bike models or routes but local medical facilities.

If Jim is here tonight listening in, he will be laughing that I didn't make it back for this function in his honour. "You what?! Wiped out on a scooter going 30 kph? Get real, Watson!"

So, goodbye, Jim. We never took a final trip together. But I think it was good we always pretended it was possible.

Guys are not really good with the mushy stuff, so I'll close by using the words of one of those storytellers that Jim liked so much, and that we listened to 31 years ago:

I want to thank you for the good years, and apologize for the rough ones.
You must be laughing yourself sick.
But I wanted to write you one before I quit.
And this one's it.
I miss you, I wanted you to know.
I miss you.