

IGGY POP

OPEN UP AND BLEED

PAUL TRYNKA

sphere

SPHERE

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*To Lucy and Curtis,
my Chinese rugs.*

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PROLOGUE

I Never Thought It Would Come To This

This wasn't magnificent, but it was definitely war. Scott Asheton hunched low behind his ride cymbal, which offered a little protection from the incoming hail. From his position at the back of the stage he could see the projectiles clearly once they flashed out of the lights – whisky bottles, Stroh's bottles, heavy black champagne bottles, glasses, coins and lit cigarettes – and Scott's vantage point and keen eyesight meant he could also spot the occasional bags of weed as they hit the stage, and point them out to his guardian John Cole, who'd throw the drugs inside Scott's bass drum for safe-keeping. He looked over at Iggy, his singer and one-time drug buddy, increasingly irritated as he realised that each time the singer whipped the crowd into a new surge of fury, he would come and stand over by the drum kit, attracting more missiles in Scott's direction. But he didn't blame Iggy. The singer was only a little more messed up than he was.

Each member of the Stooges was in his own private world as they battled through their doomed set on the freezing-cold night of 9 February 1974 at the Michigan Palace, the decayed, depressing 1920s movie hall in downtown Detroit. Pianist Scott Thurston was a recent arrival, but he'd grown to respect his bandmates for their

dumb heroism and what he thought of as their forlorn hillbilly hope, a hope he'd come to share: that maybe they could spruce up their act and grab victory from 'whatever was happening'. But this was . . . degraded, he decided. As he watched Iggy surge into the crowd to provoke them once again, he felt admiration tinged with pity. The guy was driven. Driven to everything except success.

James Williamson, the hotshot tough guy guitarist who'd seen the Stooges as his meal ticket to fame, the sensitive thug derided by most of the Stooges and their tiny camp of followers as 'the Skull', concentrated on keeping his guitar in tune and cranking out his magnificent, dangerous guitar riffs, and looked over at Iggy with something closer to contempt. Wearing a bizarre sci fi outfit crafted by Hollywood designer Bill Whitten, James looked striking from the back of the hall, but up close you could see his costume was dirty and frayed. Even a month or so ago, James had been driving the band forward, compelled to write and rehearse new material even when there was no prospect of a record company ever releasing it. But now he too was starting to despair. His singer was a failure, and he was a failure too. The Stooges had fucked their way through some damn good orgies, but his own burning drive for success was fizzling out. Once, he'd enjoyed the psychodrama, but now it was unbearable. Iggy had sold James out, and now he couldn't even keep his own act together. Nonetheless, James felt a twinge of sympathy, knowing what his one-time friend had been through.

Ron Asheton felt drained. He'd survived the most painful humiliations, sacked as the Stooges' guitarist, demoted to playing bass, estranged from his brother and his singer, clinging to the hope that the band he'd co-created could fulfil their destiny and become the American Stones. But, free of the drugs that had numbed most of his bandmates, he knew, with inescapable clarity, that this tour was beating a dead horse – a dead horse that was turning to dust. Until now, he'd survived on gallows humour, entertaining all those around him with his deadpan observations on the desperate state of his singer and his band. He'd porked some girls, had some good times, but now the good times had gone.

Then there was Iggy. Indestructible Iggy, who hoovered up whatever drugs were placed in front of his nose, who'd been thrown unconscious onto the stage by his tour manager several times over the preceding months, who'd been knocked flat by bikers a couple of days ago but invited them back to the Michigan Palace for more. Who now seemed so physically and mentally damaged, by himself and those around him, that at times both his life force and his luminous beauty looked to be draining away. By now, at least one of his closest confidantes had concluded that he'd suffered some kind of breakdown that had left his nervous system permanently damaged. His face was puffy, and there were lines etched round the hypnotic blue eyes that had charmed so many of America's desirable chicks. Tonight he'd chosen to enrage the biker audience, who were convinced he was a fag, by wearing some kind of black leotard, augmented with a shawl fashioned into a see-through skirt. Despite the ludicrous outfit, he was telling them, or maybe because of it, their girlfriends still wanted to fuck him. And just in case the message wasn't explicit enough, he enunciated lasciviously the title of the next song, 'Cock In My Pocket'. Even now, as he danced around the stage, lithe, balletic, there was a shamanic power that electrified the crowd, half of them besotted, half of them contemptuous, or perhaps simply numbed by the Quaaludes that had become the drug *du jour* at the Palace. Relentlessly, James Williamson's thuggish, psychotic guitar kept propelling Iggy forward as he threw himself into songs like 'Gimme Danger' or 'I Got Nothing', songs he'd written about feeling doomed, songs he was compelled to keep writing even when no record company was interested in releasing them. Now everyone in the audience, friend or foe, seemed to know he was doomed too. As he quipped, 'I don't care if you throw all the ice in the world, I'm making ten thousand, baby, so screw you,' everyone present knew this was empty bravado. And if Iggy Pop didn't know it, Jim Osterberg, the man who'd created this out-of-control alter ego, did.

Earlier that evening, during his short conversation with Jim, Michael Tipton, who was planning to tape that night's performance

on an open-reel recorder, had realised that this would be the last Stooges show – an occasion for Iggy to play around, to mock the audience and his own desperate state. Many fans and foes alike turned up at Stooges shows eager to see what ludicrous outfit Iggy would wear that evening, to enjoy the banter and occasional hostilities between band and audience, but this evening's was a more pointless circus than any of them had witnessed before. 'I *am* the greatest!' Iggy screamed at the audience in the show's dying moments as a hail of eggs flew on the stage, one of them hitting him in the face. As eggs soared over in Iggy's direction, Ron kept a lookout for lit cigarettes, worried they'd set fire to his hair. When a heavy coin shot out of the lights and clipped him painfully on his scalp, Ron put his hand up to where it hurt, and saw blood on his fingers.

For everyone around the Stooges, there was a sense the circus couldn't continue for much longer. Natalie Schlossman, their one-time fan club organiser, had looked after the band for nearly four years, nursemaiding Iggy when he was out of control, often tucking him up in bed and taking away his clothes in the forlorn hope he wouldn't trawl the hotel corridors in search of drugs. By now, Natalie had walked in on the band in every possible sexual combination – James in a blood-soaked bathroom with two girls, Iggy in a bedroom with three girls, Scottie Thurston and Ron in a hotel room with one girl, twenty different people in an orgy in Iggy's room – but she regarded their activities with a benign, maternal concern, cooking for them and washing their increasingly scummy costumes. Whatever pathetic state she'd found Iggy in, Natalie knew that on stage he'd reach inside himself to tap into something pure and honest. But now she found herself disturbed by the malevolent miasma around the band, for which she mostly blamed James Williamson. If it were over soon, it would be a blessing for everyone involved.

Walking over to Tipton, Iggy asked whether they should play 'Louie Louie'. James Williamson glowered at the prospect of the hackneyed garage classic, but he cranked up the song's brutally

simplistic three-chord riff, and the band lurched after him. As Iggy yelped, and shouted, 'I never thought it would come to this,' the Stooges' moronic inferno rose in intensity, and Iggy gave the audience a 'fuck you' smirk before launching into an obscene version of the lyrics that had enlivened his own star turn as Jim Osterberg, the singing drummer, nearly ten years before. Now the song that had marked the beginning of his career seemed appropriate with which to mark its end. Back in 1965, 15-year-old society debutantes had innocently thrown his favourite sweets onto the stage during an idyllic summer sojourn when he'd hung out with Michigan's wealthiest and most cultured industrial barons. Now it seemed his audience's cultural ambitions amounted to watching messy car crashes. A dumb Detroit anthem with schoolboy pottymouth lyrics, hopelessly mangled from Richard Berry's original song, 'Louie Louie' was pitched right down at their intellectual level. 'She got a rag on, I move above,' he sang, his voice raw but each word enunciated clearly, and the singer leered at the audience to make sure they recognised the reference to menstruation, 'it won't be long before I take it off . . . I feel a rose down in her hair, her ass is black and her tits are bare'.

This time around, as James Williamson ripped into a vicious, trebly guitar solo, Iggy restrained himself from leaping into the audience. There were only a few minutes to go. James's blizzard of notes transformed themselves into a pumped-up, bug-eyed, steroid version of the song's hoodlum riff before the guitarist eased himself back down to comparatively restrained broken chords and Iggy gently crooned the last verse. Then suddenly it was all over, Scottie ringing out a roll on his snare drum as Iggy proclaimed, 'Well, you missed again, so better luck next time,' and disappeared into the wings. But there would be no next time.

This sorry, funny, pitiful gig wasn't an especially low point in the Stooges' doomed recent history. They'd endured bigger humiliations, retreating from the stage shamed and beaten. This time, they'd even got to finish the set. But their singer's fighting spirit had finally been knocked out of him. All through, he'd stayed true

to the music he was convinced would transform the world, and it was all turning to shit. The following morning he telephoned his fellow Stooges to say he could take no more.

If he'd only known what lay ahead, maybe he'd have clung onto his fellow Stooges for company, for the truth was he had not hit bottom yet. There was an infinitely bigger distance to fall, a descent into a Hollywood underworld whose inhabitants would close in on him like vultures eager for their share of carrion, persuading him to repeat the ritual sacrifice and self-harm, or adopting him as a debauched trophy boyfriend before they publicly mocked his pathetic state. And the singer finally seemed to abandon his burning ambition, telling the few people who would listen that there was a hex on him, and on the Stooges. And that there was no way out.

After that would come a confused, half-awake existence, confinement in a mental institution, and shelter in an abandoned garage shared with a Hollywood rent boy. And then jail. This was the oblivion so many people considered his rightful destiny. Where several of his friends ended their confused, desperate lives with heroin overdoses, or simple alcohol abuse, Iggy's fate seemed to be that of some accursed totem, a laughing stock, an object lesson in abject failure.

Yet, even as the doomed singer dropped below anyone's radar, word of the Stooges' dumb, heroic demise was starting to spread. For some, that last stand was a modern-day re-rendering of Western mythology, the unflinching, dusty heroism of five gunslingers going to their doom in certain knowledge of their fate. For others, the parallels were almost biblical, for soon an English writer, Iggy's very own John the Baptist, would be on a plane from Los Angeles to Paris carrying a tape of the Michigan Palace show, a religious relic that would soon pass from believer to believer. As each young music fan examined the sleeve of *Metallic KO*, an album based on Michael Tipton's recordings, with its silver and black photo of Iggy laid out like Jesus in a homoerotic Deposition, they concluded that

this music constituted a vital message. This music was the long-awaited antidote to a bland world of overblown progressive pomp, of complacent country-rock cosiness, of manufactured music controlled by faceless producers and session men. Iggy's Stooges, in contrast, were the real thing: heroic, doomed, and too dumb to realise it. Their frontman became a symbol: of animalism, boredom, energy and lethargy – and of a devotion to his music that very nearly cost him his life, and perhaps still could.

And then the young fans who listened to this album embarked on quests of their own. Brian James, a guitarist in a band called Bastard, set out to 'find my own Iggy', a quest that would lead to the formation of two crucial groups called the London SS – from whose ashes would spring the Clash and Generation X – and the Damned, who would later release the call to action of a new movement that would become known as punk. Ian Curtis, an aspiring singer from Manchester, would buy the record too, playing it to his friends in Warsaw, later renamed Joy Division. Joy Division's bassist, Peter Hook, was one of many who enthused that *Metallic KO* was 'a real gig, a real live record', the only live album that reflected how it felt at his own fast-rising band's chaotic shows, where everything balanced 'on a knife edge'. Other English kids like John Lydon and Glen Matlock were listening too, and would adopt the Stooges' songs for their own band, the Sex Pistols. Another evening, during one of his first visits to New York, Joe Strummer would play the album over and over as he spent the night with a new lover, immersing himself in its volume and intensity. Even decades later, kids like Anthony Kiedis or Jack White listened to the Stooges and resolved to follow their musical blueprint. Not every single person who listened to *Metallic KO*, or its predecessors, formed a band. But enough of them did to ensure that, within a few years, the invincible singer was on the rise again, revered by a new audience. It was another incredible twist in a life and career that would always subvert expectations, both in its highs and in its lows.

By 1976, Iggy Pop had regained his aura of invincibility, and emerged from limbo to greet a new, expectant generation of fans. But as these fans met the self-acclaimed 'World's Forgotten Boy', shocked that Iggy Pop had survived intact, there was another surprise in store for them. Don Was, famed producer for the Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan and others, who had seen the Stooges in his youth and helped engineer Iggy's career revival in the 1990s, puts it as well as anybody.

'Meeting the guy, I could not believe what he was like. I guess it didn't contradict anything else I believed about him. I was just shocked that a guy who was willing to cut himself up with broken glass was also so articulate. It didn't mean that he was too smart to have done those things, that all those stories weren't true. But it was a total shock.'

Don's surprise was explicable, for he was not just meeting Iggy Pop. He was also meeting Jim Osterberg: the ambitious, charming, charismatic boy from Ann Arbor who had created this legendary rock 'n' roll animal. Most of those who have been caught in the laser-beam intensity of a one-on-one meeting with this man speak of the same feeling. Jim's voice is warm, intelligent, reminiscent of that of Jimmy Stewart, as is his effortless charm: he seems the perfect American icon, warm, alive, acute and playful. Impressively lithe, he inhabits his body gracefully, like a cat. The conversation ranges from Bertolt Brecht to Greek mythology, the avant garde to t'ai chi, the difference between the Apollonian and the Dionysian ideal. He fixes his clear blue eyes upon you, staring into your own eyes in almost disconcertingly rapt attention, but occasionally looks away in a coy, boyish kind of way, or breaks into a broad, seductive smile when he gets to the end of a harrowing anecdote. His voice is rich and elegant; he listens intently to questions, laughing at the ridiculous nature of his own life, wittily describing the many ludicrous predicaments in which he's placed himself, caricaturing the self-destructive voices he'd hear in his head. For someone celebrated as perhaps the most committed, forceful performer ever to take a stage, he is shockingly and consistently self-deprecating. But

never, even for one moment, does he suggest that his commitment to his music is anything but unyielding and absolute.

As you walk away from an encounter with Jim Osterberg, your head will probably be spinning, quite possibly with love and adoration, almost certainly with profound respect and a feeling of empathy. Fellow rock stars, casual members of the public, lords and media magnates, countless thousands of people will talk of their encounter with this driven, talented, indomitable creature, a man who has plumbed the depths of depravity, yet emerged with an indisputable nobility. Each of them will share an admiration and appreciation of the contradictions and ironies of his incredible life. Even so, they are unlikely to fully comprehend both the heights and the depths of his experience, for the extremes are simply beyond the realms of most people's understanding.

Many musicians have doubtless suffered similar mockery and violence, countless others have demonstrated a similar capacity for self-harm and drug abuse, and more than a few have been taken up as heroes, decades later, by new legions of disciples. Yet no other figure seems to speak, like Iggy Pop, to generation after generation of musicians at such an intimate, personal level, nor inspire wave after wave of music that pervades the mainstream. Just as the Damned's Brian James treasured his own copy of the Stooges' *Fun House* in the early 1970s, so would Nirvana's Kurt Cobain play the same band's *Raw Power* over and over, nearly two decades later, confiding to his journal that it was his favourite album of all time, even writing a song for his hero. Later still, in a new century, Iggy would finally appear at festivals alongside other celebrated fans, like the White Stripes or the Red Hot Chili Peppers, skipping, spinning and screaming before tens of thousands of 23-year-olds. Meanwhile, the musicians who topped the bill over him all those years ago, who threw lightbulbs at him or publicly dismissed him as a loser, play to shrinking crowds of ageing fans.

Every aspect of Iggy Pop that attracted outrage or incomprehension in the past – his appearance, his breaking down of the barriers between performer and audience, the eloquent simplicity

of his music or the truculent anomie of his lyrics – has become an integral element of today's rock and alternative music. This is a turnaround that seems almost without historical parallel, yet it cannot be considered a simple fairytale ending. Not when one considers the physical and mental depredations, the disasters and the rejections, that went on for decade after decade, even when by all accounts Iggy Pop was happily rehabilitated and reconciled with his creator, Jim Osterberg.

The legend and the music of Iggy Pop is today celebrated. Yet behind it there are endless confused stories and mysteries. How could one musician be so revered, yet so reviled? And how could one man be so clever, and so stupid?

CHAPTER 1

Most Likely To

It was a beautiful drive up to Silver Lake, a resort just east of Lake Michigan where high school kids lucky enough to own their own automobiles would hang out on the beach for the summer. It was 1965, and Jim Osterberg had just joined the car-owning set, but as was his habit he had flouted the conventional entry requirements of parental approval, driving licence – even driving lessons. Lynn Klavitter, his steady date throughout twelfth grade, was impressed that Jim had saved up enough cash to afford the '57 Chevy station wagon, but wasn't so impressed by his driving on the 200-mile trip to the resort. Yet the more she asked him to slow down, calmly, avoiding confrontation, the more her kind-hearted, funny, but increasingly headstrong boyfriend floored the accelerator, insisting he was in control.

On the final stretch of Highway 31 up to Silver Lake, Lynn started to lose her temper as Jim coaxed the reluctant old red and white Chevy up to ninety miles an hour. Suddenly they were shouting at each other, and just as suddenly the wagon's back end started fishtailing, then swerving out of control. As the novice driver tried to correct the swerve, the car veered off the road; it flipped over once, then twice, then a third time, ploughing down

two trees on the grass verge, crashing upside-down through bushes as wood splinters and dust filled the car.

As the Chevy groaned to a halt on its roof, its teenage passengers scrambled out of the open windows and looked at each other. The car was a total wreck, but apart from scratches from tree bark, and Jim's bruises from the steering wheel, they were both, unbelievably, unharmed. All was quiet. Calmly, Jim picked up the number plate that had been ripped from the Chevy, linked hands with Lynn and they walked off up the hill and all the way to the resort, where they would both lie on the beach in the sun.

It was maybe a couple of days later that Osterberg told his closest friend, Jim McLaughlin, how lucky he was to be alive. 'Here we go, another of Osterberg's tall tales,' thought McLaughlin, and promptly forgot about it. A few years later, Iggy Stogge mentioned to a journalist how he was special, that he'd survived what should have been a fatal accident and he was destined to make his mark. Even though the notion of an indestructible rock star seemed faintly ludicrous, like many of his inflated claims it made good copy.

These were optimistic, booming, postwar years in America, when anything seemed possible. It was a time and a place when a smart kid, brought up in an environment seething with intellectuals and scientific savants, driven by intelligent, hard-working, ambitious parents, could seemingly do anything he wanted. He could make friends with some of the most powerful figures in the industrial world, and witness first-hand an intimate arts scene peopled with characters who would later become superstars. With this environment, the right kind of kid – one with drive, a fierce intelligence and the right kind of charm – could become President of the United States. And this was the future that classmates and teachers in Ann Arbor predicted for Jim Osterberg, the witty, well-dressed classroom politician, a kid with an enviable knack of making connections with the rich and powerful.

Coachville Gardens trailer park sits in green surroundings on Carpenter Road, just outside the city of Ann Arbor, officially in the

town of Ypsilanti, Michigan. Although it's gained the inevitable gaggle of sprawling out-of-town stores, Ypsilanti is still mostly a lush, quiet place where nothing much happens. There are plenty of isolated wooden houses where you can live undisturbed, watching out for cranes and squirrels in the summer, and taking your dogs for long, reflective walks through the crisp virginal snow in the winter. It's a beautiful setting, although, like many small country towns, there's occasionally a feeling of claustrophobia, and it's easy to bump into slightly odd characters who watch jerry-rigged cable TV late into the night, haunt internet chat rooms or get loaded on Class A drugs to numb their boredom.

Although these days Ypsilanti rather grandly terms itself a city, in reality it's overshadowed by its much bigger neighbour, Ann Arbor, which since 1837 has been defined by the presence of the University of Michigan. The university was celebrated for its diverse curriculum and liberal ethos and, together with the presence of General Motors and Ford in nearby Detroit, it would attract a constant influx of new residents to the city and stimulate thriving local industries in engineering, pharmaceuticals and electronics.

It was the influence of the university that ensured Ann Arbor was a classy town. People who lived there drank espresso, formed arts groups and took dancing lessons. In contrast, people from Ypsilanti were often regarded as Midwestern hillbillies. The two towns weren't totally uneasy bedfellows: plenty of academics might dispense intellectual wisdom at the university and then return home to a sprawling isolated farmhouse in Ypsi's beautiful countryside, but the divide was perceptible for anyone who crossed the city limits: the gap between people whose salary was generated by their intellects, and those whose weekly paycheck was earned with the rude labour of their hands on a farm or in a factory; between people of culture and rural rubes. It was on that divide that Jim Osterberg and Iggy Pop grew up.

As a rock star, Iggy Pop would often refer to his upbringing in a trailer park, the definitive blue-collar home. But as a schoolboy, Jim Osterberg was regarded as the middle-class boy most likely to

succeed. Other kids admired, and some of them envied, his elegant dress, his parents' house in Ann Arbor Hills – an elegant enclave peopled by academics, architects and the nation's most significant captains of industry – and a confidence that seemed unshakeable.

In the late 1940s, Ann Arbor, along with most of Michigan, was undergoing an economic boom. Money still flowed in from military contracts, while industrial giants including Ford and General Motors were readying themselves for a huge expansion in demand as a million ex-servicemen prepared to spend their government home loans. In the east of the state, all the way over to Detroit and its huge River Rouge Ford plant, new factory buildings sprouted in once green and peaceful locations with resonant Native American names. Multi-storey buildings shot up on the Michigan University campus, and although housing was being developed all round the city, there was still a severe shortage. In 1948, a small group of businessmen headed by Perry Brown, who managed a machine shop in the city, and the Gingras brothers – Irv, Leo and George – developed a small trailer park on Carpenter Road, which they named Coachville Gardens, aiming to attract workers at the Ford factory and the local telephone company. Among the first people to move in, in the fall of 1949, were James Newell Osterberg, his wife Louella and infant son James Newell Junior, who had been born, prematurely, in Muskegon's Osteopathic Hospital on 21 April 1947. The unconventionally small family would become well known around Coachville Gardens: 'It was a small trailer with a very large mother and a very skinny tall father,' says Brad Jones, who lived nearby, 'like something you'd see in a cult movie. The trailer was very small, and the dad was an Ichabod Crane kinda guy, real tall and thin, and mom was just a square body. But you know what? They connected alright. Somehow it worked.'

Jim Osterberg's earliest memory is of being in Louella's lap, playing a game where 'she'd recite a kind of a chant, in Danish, then on the last word almost drop me to the floor and pick me back up. And I wanted to do it again and again.' Jim Junior grew up in the presence of his mother's warm, nurturing love, and his

father's baseball accoutrements ('He had played some semi-pro baseball; he had an enormous bat, and the mitt, and everything that goes with it').

James Newell Osterberg Senior, the dominating influence in the life of the son who carried his name, was born on 28 March 1921; he was of Irish and English descent, but spent his youth in a Michigan orphanage, lonely and unwanted until two spinster Jewish sisters named Esther and Ida Osterberg walked in and decided that 14-year-old James was the child who most needed a home. They nurtured and loved him, and paid for his education, before passing away in quick succession: one in mourning for their lovely house, bulldozed to make way for a highway, and the second for her adored sister. James appreciated the break he'd been given late in life and worked hard at school. A keen baseball player, he later played in the minor leagues and tried out for the Brooklyn Dodgers, although he never obtained the contract card that designated professional athlete status. Like many of his generation, James Osterberg's education was interrupted by the war, but his obvious college potential meant he was trained as a radio operator in the Army Air Force (in later years he would still remember his missions over Germany and warn his son off the place). After the war James Senior toyed with studying dentistry and osteopathy, before training as a teacher of English and moving to Ypsilanti to take a job at the high school on Packard Road, a four-minute drive from Coachville.

James Osterberg Senior was regarded by most of those who knew him as a reserved, even severe teacher, who graded his students strictly. As well as teaching English, he assisted in sports. As a new teacher, he was more likely to teach the less academic pupils, in which case much of the emphasis in the English lessons was on public speaking. Many of his ex-pupils remember being intimidated by him during their school days, although as adults they've come to admire his tenacity and commitment; one pupil, Mary Booth, describes him as her most 'feared – and favourite' teacher. Around 1958 Osterberg landed a better-paid job at Fordson High,

in the Dearborn district, an area on the outskirts of Detroit dominated by a huge Ford plant. The bigger paycheck meant the family could move from their Spirit trailer to a much bigger New Moon, all futuristic and Jetsony. At Fordson, Osterberg was respected as a committed, dedicated and fair teacher, who would occasionally unleash a quick, dry humour. 'Mr O' was an idealist; sometimes this made life difficult, notably when he unsuccessfully attempted to found a teachers' union. According to Jim Junior, only one friend backed him up, and the project was abandoned.

Not all of Mr Osterberg's charges remember his lessons, but those who do retain huge respect for his dedication and perseverance. Patricia Carson Celusta was inspired to become a high school teacher by his example, and credits him with transforming her from a shy girl into a confident public speaker. 'He made you think beyond yourself,' she recalls fondly, remembering that this inspirational figure helped impart 'truths that have sustained us all'. Now retired after her own long career as an English and speech teacher, Patricia Celusta hails James Osterberg as 'the very definition of a teacher', and still treasures a battered old copy of the English textbook from which he taught. Mr O inculcated confidence and the power of the spoken word into his successful pupils, as well as encouraging their understanding of wider cultural and literary issues. Many other ex-pupils back up Patricia's description of him as committed, capable and fair. So does Osterberg Junior. But this was the 1950s, and Jim Senior was a military-minded man, and that intellectual rigour required a backbone of discipline, which meant on several occasions he would resort to using the belt or the hickory stick on his son.

While Jim Junior would disappoint his disciplinarian father countless times over the following years, and often confront him, sometimes with violent undertones, you could say the belt and hickory stick worked. Like his father, Jim was a driven personality, although in his case that drive was wrapped up in a charm and wackiness that also betrayed the influence of his easy-going and loving mom.

Around Coachville Gardens, Mr Osterberg was regarded as an intimidating presence, although a few people speculate that some of that severity came from necessity, given his job. According to neighbour Brad Jones, 'He'd only be severe if you let him get away with it.' James Senior's tough, no-nonsense attitude ('trailers make sense' was how he justified the family's unconventional abode) was reflected in his dress and military haircut. But he would also take Jim Junior on long idyllic drives into the country. When Frank Sinatra came on the radio, Osterberg Senior would sing along with him. Over fifty years later, his son remembers drives in the Osterberg Cadillac, listening to his dad crooning 'Young At Heart', and dreaming of becoming a singer.

Louella Osterberg, née Kristensen, was a cuddly woman of Danish, Swedish and Norwegian blood, who doted on the two men in the house and became a well-loved figure around Western Ypsilanti, despite working full-time in an office at Bendix, one of the main industrial employers in Ann Arbor. In later years she would preside over increasingly competitive arguments between father and son, but remained remarkably unfazed. Somehow, for all the male aggression on display in the tiny trailer in later years, there seemed little doubt that this was a happy, loving, if unconventional, family.

For many people in Coachville Gardens, the trailer park represented an American arcadia, where kids in bibbed denim overalls played happily in rolling fields, dreaming of Sputnik and Superman. Parents could leave their children to play around the park, safe in the knowledge they'd be watched over by friendly adults in the close-knit community. It was probably this family atmosphere, plus the postwar housing shortage in Ann Arbor, that initially drew the Osterbergs to the park; once there, though, they stayed put until the autumn of 1982, becoming some of Coachville's longest-term residents. There was green farmland all round, the nearest building being a stone, one-room elementary school on the other side of Carpenter Road. The Leveretts' adjacent farmhouse was the premier hangout for kids in the area, who could

earn pocket money working at Chuck and Dorothy's vegetable stall or picking corn for them in the summer. For Osterberg Senior the presence of Pat's Par Three golf course, right beside the trailer park, was a major draw. Behind the trailer park a small track led to the railway lines. Young James could hear the mournful hoot of freight trains passing through at night, and in the daytime he could sneak down to watch them clatter past on their way from New York to Chicago.

On most days, kids from the trailer park played baseball or football around its snaking driveway. From the age of two or so Jim was a regular at the kids' birthday parties, although he spent more time in his trailer than most. Although not a snob, James Senior was careful about the kids with whom his son associated. He was particularly worried when Jim Junior wandered down to see the Bishops, who were 'different'. Jim would later describe them as 'bona fide hillbillies'; however, the Bishops were well liked, fun to be around and a natural focus for Jim's attentions. But when Jim Junior later developed a fascination with the precocious Diane Bishop, Jim Senior seemed to acquire an almost supernatural omniscience, and he inevitably turned up to whisk his son away from her. Osterberg Senior had no such concerns about Duane Brown and Sharon Ralph, whose parents had helped develop the site, and both remember childhood games around the park, although Sharon remembers, 'Jim didn't play out as much as the other kids, although you'd always see him at parties. His mom was popular, I liked to go over there, she always seemed so kind, calm and pleasant to be around.' In contrast, Mr Osterberg frightened the kids: 'I don't know why,' says Duane Brown. 'He was a very tall thin man with a marine haircut and I didn't like being with him. He never did anything that made us not like him, he just came across as very gruff.'

In the family atmosphere of Coachville, where stay-at-home moms nurtured large families, the Osterbergs, with two wage-earners and just one child, were out of the ordinary. Describing his earliest memories, Jim remembers mostly solitary images: sleeping

and resting on a shelf over the kitchenette in his parents' 18-foot trailer, watching *Howdy Doody* in black and white on a tiny TV screen, or observing his dad chatting to a friend from the services in the back yard – a fully fledged cowboy in boots and Stetson: 'I'd never seen anybody like that and I really liked him.' As an only child who had recurring bouts of asthma, he was doted on by both parents, who took out the back seat of their Cadillac and built a big shelf in its place where the four-year-old Jim could walk about or lie in his crib as they drove around enjoying the countryside on Sunday afternoons, during their precious time together. Later on, although he might join Sharon or Duane for a walk into the fields or down to the railway track, he would also wander off alone for long walks or, more often, sit at home or at his babysitter's, Mrs Light, dreaming of science fiction, imagining himself as Superman or the Atomic Brain. Over these and subsequent years, he often missed school for extended periods due to bouts of asthma, and during these times he inhabited an imaginary world, which in his own mind set him apart from his schoolmates. When he was on his asthma medication, those imaginary worlds were even more vivid: 'It was ephedrine. They're cracking down now on pseudo-ephedrine, which is the basic ingredient for speed. I had real ephedrine, which was much better. It made me feel . . . great. It puts a bit of a poetic edge on things. And it stimulated my creativity, I'm afraid.'

Perhaps it was the attention he got from his parents, perhaps it was the verbal sparring and intellectual challenges constantly presented by his father, perhaps it was simply a result of measuring his intelligence against others, but it was obvious from the earliest days at elementary school that Jim Osterberg thought he was special. Quite a few other kids, and some of the teachers, shared that opinion. Slight in build, Jim Junior was full of energy, with a cheeky, slightly coy smile. He had a natural bounce in his step, and a kind of cute goofiness about him; he looked almost like an overgrown kids' doll, with a slim body, round head and enormous blue eyes with oversized lashes. His playful, almost coquettish charm

seemed the perfect match to his looks. That cuteness allowed him to get away with a lot; most notably, it prevented the kid from a more educated household, with a bigger vocabulary and innate confidence, from being considered a smartass by his schoolmates. Instead he was a ringleader. Although for some kids those first days at school are a traumatic experience, Jim Osterberg, with his network of Coachville friends, had no such problems.

For nearly a century, Carpenter Elementary had been a simple one-room Victorian schoolhouse, directly opposite what became Coachville Gardens; Jim and his Coachville friends were the first kids to enrol at a much larger, newly erected brick and glass building nearby on Central Boulevard, which opened to students in 1952. Jim's network of friends soon included Sharon, Duane, Kay Dellar, Sandra Sell, Joan Hogan, Sylvia Shippey, Steve Briggs and Jim Rutherford – plus Brad Jones, who arrived from San Diego in 1956. They all regarded Jim as funny, energetic, smart and the leader of their gang, says Brown. 'He figured out how to get himself and the rest of us in trouble. One time in fourth grade he learned a new word, and that word was "fuck". He suggested I use that word to the teacher, I can't remember what he told me it meant, and got a bunch of us into trouble with our class teacher, Miss Connors.'

The young Osterberg frequently earned the formidable ire of his fourth-grade teacher, Rachel Schreiber, who'd occasionally swipe his knuckles with a ruler, but his obvious intelligence, most notably his verbal fluency and impressive vocabulary, ensured he was regarded with some indulgence and fondness by the teaching staff. By fourth grade, Jim Osterberg knew how to make people notice him. The blue-eyed boy was often described as 'cute' and was precocious around his teachers, but his eagerness to prove himself top dog – his ambition, even, if you could use that term for one so young – didn't hamper his natural charm. His manner was, says Brown, 'flirtatious. Connected. He understood what socially works to charm people.'

'Even at an early age, he was a character,' says Brad Jones.

'Always funny, always eclectic. But also very tortureable. We used to literally hold him down in class and tickle him and make him pee. You know, stuff that fifth and sixth graders do.' In class, Jim was particularly absorbed by the stories about America's frontier culture. They stimulated fantasies of being 'Daniel Boone and Jim Bowie. Jim Bowie, as tall as a big oak tree; I can do anything, and I have to be out there on the edge.'

It was easy to make friends and charm people at Carpenter Elementary, with its classes of fewer than twenty kids, all of whom lived just a short walk from each other. Carpenter was the centre of west Ypsilanti's social world. For kids, the school or the Leveretts' farm were the main out-of-hours hangouts; for parents, too, the school was a great place to meet their neighbours, at square dances and other cosy, countrified, family events; Louella Osterberg was a familiar figure at them, helping out on cake stalls and rummage sales at school bazaars – no mean accomplishment, as she was the only mom most people remember who also held down a full-time job.

Already the centre of his own tiny universe, from the age of six Jim Osterberg entered a new, bigger social circle after his father enrolled as a teacher and counsellor at Varsity day camp, a summer camp for middle-class kids established by Irvin 'Wiz' Wisniewski at Cordley Lake near Pinckney, Michigan. But these more middle-class boys who met young Jim and his Ichabod Crane dad outside their natural domain remember a very different creature from the confident Carpenter child. 'The counsellors would pick you up from your home,' remembers Mike Royston, who attended from 1954, 'and Jimmy would come with his dad. I remember him as excessively shy, and the picture that flashes in my mind is him cuddled next to his dad in the car, as his dad was driving us to and from camp. He was an unusual little boy with enormous blue eyes. Studying you, but in a shy, furtive way. He'd give you little side-glances. Did not maintain eye contact for very long. And his dad was excessively taciturn. Did you ever see the movie *Cool Hand Luke*? Well, if you can recall the guy with no eyes, just sunglasses,

that was Jim's dad. He didn't say much, just kinda directed traffic. I don't remember ever seeing the guy smile.'

In subsequent years, Jim Junior would frequently moan to his new, more privileged schoolmates about his dad – his complaints were so vehement that most of them thought he was exaggerating. But in his happy, playful years at Carpenter, he stood out as an intelligent, charismatic, talkative kid. During summer evenings Wiz Wisniewski would often visit the family to spend pleasant hours at Pat's Par Three, and he would sometimes spend more time chatting with the son than with the father: 'Mr Osterberg was a somewhat reserved gentleman, but he enjoyed playing golf, and we had a very nice relationship with father and son. Young Jim was just learning, an active boy who played left handed, and we all enjoyed each other's company. I can still remember those evenings.'

For most American schoolkids, the transition from elementary to junior high school is a critical rite of passage. Untold numbers of movies, books, songs and poems record the shattered illusions, psychological traumas or long-treasured triumphs of those crucial early teenage years, which for many defined the shape of the adult life that would follow. Jim Osterberg managed this transition with enviable ease – in fact, he would leave his junior high celebrated by his schoolmates as one who would do great things. However, as an adult, Osterberg would term himself an outsider, someone marked out by the fact he was raised on a trailer park. The petty indignities endured at the hands of his comfortably middle-class contemporaries seemed to rankle with him for decades; in later years that belief would drive him, an abiding sense that he was an outcast. But for his one-time Carpenter friends, who watched as Jim graduated to hanging with 'the snooty kids', that belief seemed at best ironic – and at worst, completely ludicrous.

Duane Brown still recalls Jim's competitiveness: 'He was always trying to outdo the rest of us. And he was pretty good at it.' No one in his small group of friends resented Jim's need to prove himself