

IN MEMORIAM Dr. James Duke (1929-2017)

Jim Duke's Lexicon:

A Personal Tribute to My Teacher and His Way with Words

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One thing that always inspired me about Jim Duke was his way with the lexicon. His words lit up my mind all over, much like the “herbal shotgun” of which he so often preached.

Jim Duke could play with words in so many ways. Many of us knew him as the witty herbal folk singer of the *Herbalbum*.

He encouraged me to write songs too – one time he surprised me at Wild Herb Weekend in North Carolina by jumping on stage and singing backup while playing his fiddle as I performed my Appalachian ditty. This is my most treasured memory of him. You can see an excerpt of one of his songs below.

One of the reasons I first started following Jim Duke's work and ultimately became his student groupie is because I loved his book, *The Green Pharmacy*. I experimented with a lot of the remedies in the book and I was able to share tips from the Spanish translated edition, *La Farmacia Natural*, with my Spanish-speaking aunts. The book said to rub cayenne on an achy joint, so once I vigorously rubbed fresh *Capsicum* onto my sore foot, only to curse when my foot was on fire for hours! It did heal the pain for good though.

Speaking of cursing, Jim Duke actually published a pamphlet called the *Lewd Latin Lexicon* where he kept track of Spanish slang and curse words he encountered during his travels through my family's homeland in South America. He once gifted me a case of these signed booklets so I'd always have ready gifts for students and colleagues. Needless



Jim Duke Speaks

Click on the photograph for a fall 2013 video tour of the Green Farmacy Garden with Dr. James Duke and gardener Helen Metzman. Jim Duke talks about homeostasis and shows the stamens of *Crocus sativus* (saffron crocus), among other garden wonders.

CREDIT: Green Farmacy Garden <https://thegreenfarmacygarden.com/>



to say, I did not share these with my aunts!

My teacher always had words for us. Anyone who knew Jim Duke can probably close their eyes and hear his soft-spoken, southern voice roll out multisyllabic chemical compounds as smoothly as if he were speaking a foreign Romance language. I can't even begin to guess how many words he wrote and published in his lifetime. Indeed, 15 editions of the JAHG featured his *Reductionist's Rant* column on wide-ranging and fascinating subjects – from herbs for superbugs and viruses to Alzheimer's disease prevention and the Cuban food pharmacy – but always with his beloved phytochemistry and ethnobotany in mind.

When I told Jim Duke that I was writing a book, he looked at me and immediately said, "Yes I will." "You'll what?" I replied. "Yes, I will write your forward." By this point, we had gone from being student and teacher to being colleagues. This was a progression of a relationship I had never dreamed of, but now treasure as a rare milestone between myself and many of my own students. Unfortunately, my affliction with writer's block prevented the timely manifestation of my book. It is ironic that I find myself here, emotional and choking on my own words, as I revere my late and dear herbalist teacher who had all the words. ■

Green Garden Song (excerpt)

Lyrics by James Duke

(sung to the tune of James Taylor's "Fire and Rain")

The garden's seen the sun and the garden's seen the rain
Garden's lotta fun, sometimes a little pain;
The garden is a soulmate, got a soul unto itself
Can help you resonate, help you get back to health

The garden always smiles but sometimes some plant dies
Some plants last awhile, and some too quickly die
Some flower in the spring, some flower in the fall
Each does its magic thing, to make us all recall

We saw you yesterday, but you left us all today
Crying here alone, with you so damn far gone
Your soul still carries on for those of us you've known
A big bag of rain, not to see you again.

You can see a collection of Jim Duke's folk songs at <https://thegreenfarmacygarden.com/2013/10/06/jim-dukes-songbook-for-the-2013-aceer-legacy-award/>.

THE JAHG JIM DUKE ARCHIVE

In honor of Jim Duke, the American Herbalists Guild is making an archive of his JAHG *Reductionist's Rant* columns available for public enjoyment at the AHG website.