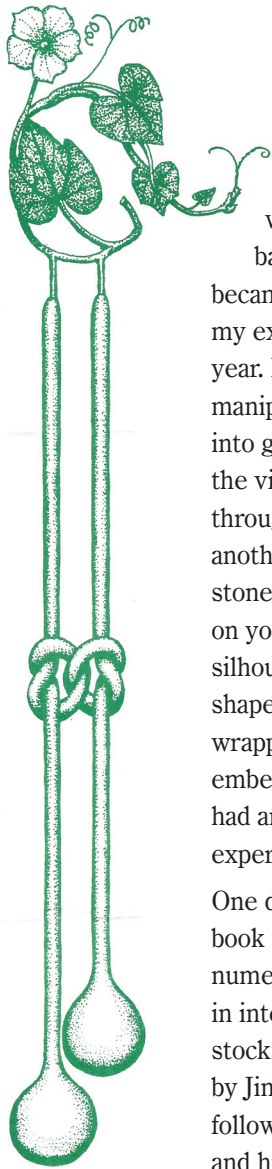


# Remembering Jim Story

## By Betty Finch



*The double-knotted long-handle dipper gourds on a vine logo above is used to identify Jim Story articles in "The Gourd Magazine". The graphic is from Jim's stationery.*

Twenty years ago I started experimenting with etching pictures on growing gourds in my backyard garden in Bakersfield, California. I became obsessed with gourd manipulation, expanding my experimentation and adding new varieties each year. I'd lay awake at night thinking of new ideas for manipulating gourds. One season I injected dyes into growing gourds in an attempt to color them on the vine. To my surprise not a hint of color came through on any of them. Where did all that dye go? In another experiment I tried unsuccessfully to embed stones into gourds. I taped duct-tape animal designs on young gourds creating delightful light-colored silhouettes on the skin, only to watch the animal shapes disappear when the skin was cleaned off. My wrapped gourds were heavily scarred with the wire embedded into the wood. Few of my experiments had any value other than providing a fun learning experience.

One day I was thumbing through a borrowed gourd book when a photograph of a trellis containing numerous long-handled dipper gourds being grown in interesting shapes by using ropes, stakes, and stockings caught my attention. "Hand-trained gourds by Jim Story" read the caption. In the months to follow I ran across other pictures of this Jim Story and his fabulous gourds. What a brilliant gourd manipulator! I so wanted to meet him.

The chance came in 1998 while attending what was then called "The World's Largest Gourd Festival" in Mt. Gilead, Ohio. Jim Story was on a panel of experts speaking about growing gourds. What a wonderful opportunity to learn many aspects about growing and manipulating gourds. Jim stayed after the formal discussion ended to answer individual questions. I was confused about how to grow a spiral shaped gourd, Jim patiently tried to explain, then took down my address to send pictures. Jim taught me more with that letter than I could have learned in years of trial and error on my own. A few weeks later a box of green-scraped Miniature Nigerian Bottle gourds arrived unexpectedly. All Jim asked for in return was for me to freely share what he had taught me with others. I also shared the seeds from those tiny gourds with California gourd growers. I used one to woodburn a name-tag necklace for Jim pyroengraving a knotted long-handle dipper gourd on it and the

words, "Jim Story, master gourd manipulator". I was elated to see him wearing his name-tag necklace at many gourd festivals.



*Photo by Jim Lee in 1999 of manipulated gourds in Jim Story's garden.*

Over the years more letters followed. Jim always typed his letters on his gourd stationery with a manual typewriter, carefully using correction fluid on any mistakes. May 1999 Jim typed one of these letters thanking me for attending the 1998 Indiana gourd Show and inviting me to return. He included photographs of his latest manipulated gourds hanging from a trellis, giving written permission to use them in publications.

Nearly every year after that Jim sent me a box of gourds, they often included hand-trained gourds. The gourds were always immaculately green-cleaned, and the box always included a type-written letter that said the gourds were being sent with no strings attached. Until December 2003 when the letter in the box of gourds said, "I am sending you these gourds WITH STRINGS ATTACHED. Here's the deal: Make a new and special gourd hat for the Indiana Gourd Show Hat Contest. Consider wearing gourd jewelry and gourd clothing; also do your best to get all of the California gourders coming to the Indiana show to make gourd hats." The box was crammed with green cleaned

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## Remembering continued

gourds including many grown in flat molds. Jim added in bold print that Jane had helped him green clean the gourds. Wow, did that provide inspiration! I constructed a 3 ft tall gourd hat which assembled with magnets and flashed circles of rainbow colors from a front headlamp.

I made gourd hats to take to Indiana every year, largely because of Jim's encouragement and I'd find a home for them before I left the show to make room in my luggage for all the gourds I'd purchase there.

Other interesting things Jim mentioned in his letters included an idea to try to get gourds featured on post office stamps, and wondering why gourds and gourd vines were not used in the Rose Parade.

I tried to purchase one of Jim's hand-trained gourds and learned the only way to buy one was to out-bid others for one of the gourds he donated to silent auction fund raisers for the state shows. I remember standing next to a bid sheet writing bids as fast as I could right up until they yelled stop. I got the Jim Story gourd that time. It was a very large twisted XL Dipper which I held in my lap on the plane ride home. Jim didn't sell his gourds, but he would send them as gifts to designers and artists around the country.



*Photo by Jim Lee in 1999 of manipulated gourds in Jim Story's garden.*



*Betty Finch and Jim Story at an Indiana Gourd Festival*

Here is what I know about Jim's history; Jim Story was born in Alabama, served 20 years in the navy followed by another 10 years in the Naval Reserves. His second career was with the Indiana Reformatory as hospital administrator. Jim lived in Pendleton, Indiana with his gracious wife, Jane. Jim's gourd garden was located along the bank of Fall Creek a short walk from their home. His garden was an interesting mix of flowers, vegetables and gourds. He would take anyone interested on a tour of his garden, explaining how he manipulates the gourds.

Jim was quick to share vegetables and starts of his other plants. He had a reputation for being sincere, genuine, gentle, and generous. He really knew how to encourage, inspire and to help. He was involved with gourds for about 40 years. He was a member of a garden club when he saw a dried flower arrangement in a gourd container and he wanted to do some of his own. A friend introduced him to the Ohio Gourd Show and Jim began exhibiting there, not missing a show in 30 years. Jim helped organize the Indiana Gourd Society. Jim's gourd arrangements have won Best of Show numerous times.

Reviewing the letters from Jim over the years I realized they have 5 things in common. Whenever I attended an out-of-state gourd festival Jim typed a personal letter to, 1. Thank me for attending. 2. Invite me to attend again. 3. Compliment me on my participation (citing precisely what it was he was most impressed with). 4. Send greetings to the rest of the gourd crafters in my state. 5. Challenge me to create something specific for an upcoming festival.

There is a lesson here for all of us if we want to increase participation at our festivals. We don't have to use a manual typewriter; we can use email, telephones or texting. Reach out to those who travel a long distance to attend our festivals and thank them for their participation, let them know specifically what you appreciated about their participation, invite them back, and challenge them to take part in their area of expertise again.

The last box of gourds I received from Jim Story was a large one. It contained many gourds including a large trellis-grown Indonesian Bottle Gourd. From the letter I could tell Jim did not expect to be on this earth much longer. I was both happy

and sad walking around my yard crying like a baby carrying the letter and a handful of the gourds.

Jim left us shortly after that and in his memory the Jim Story Award was created. The national competition challenges us to be innovative and create new ways to manipulate gourds. In addition we should share the process of how we do it. Jim never charged for teaching gourd manipulation, he only asked that we share what he taught with others.

Jim had a significant impact on my personal life journey. It carried me to China to meet master gourd molder, Mr. Zhang Cairi, to speak at the International Forum on gourds in Huludao, China, and to meet many Chinese gourd artists. I co-authored a book with Guojun Zhang which we dedicated to Jim Story. Guojun Zhang later wrote the book, "American Gourd Art" published in Chinese, which includes a chapter about Jim Story.

Since news that the Jim Story Award had fallen short of the necessary funding emerged, several people have come forward with offers to make personal donations to the Jim Story Award to ensure it is funded for the next couple of years. State chapters will also be given the opportunity to donate more than the flat amount in past years. A renewed interest in the award has been generated. There has been discussion about expanding the award should funds become available to include a category for multiple manipulated gourds that cannot be separated, and to add a child's category. If you are interested in donating on a personal level, contact the Jim Story Award Committee. jimstoryaward@gmail.com

You may also want to consider growing a 2014 gourd for the Jim Story Award competition. Plant a seed, think about different ways you can change the shape. Experiment! Take pictures. Share your results with others, encourage others to



join in the fun. Look at pictures of past winning gourds and get information about entering on the AGS website <http://www.americangourdsociety.org> click on Jim Story Award Contest for details.

## AGS JUDGING COLUMN

*Terry Noxel, AGS Judging Coordinator*

Thank you to the many AGS Certified and Apprentice Judges who were actively judging at Gourd Shows in 2013. Your work makes a difference - for the reputation of the individual competitions with quality judging;

showing respect for the artists who put their best work there for all to see and hopefully get recognition for it too. It's a hard job, and we all thank you for accepting the responsibility to do your very best work whether you are acting as a judge or clerk.



Another thank you goes to the many judges who have been hosting the "What Judges Are Looking For" and "Mock Judging" sessions. The feedback I have received has been glowing. Keep up the great work. It benefits you and

your colleagues to look more closely at gourds for what could have been done neater; what category does it belong in (a.k.a. predominant technique); and how to read the show book/competition category descriptions.

One last thing. All judges who participated in one of these "continuing education" events needs to let me know so that I can add it to your judging profile. The Apprentice Judges will become Certified Judges when they have completed 2 or more continuing education activities and judged/clerked at 2 shows in a 3 year period. Certified Judges need to complete these same requirements to maintain their Certified Judge status.

- What details are needed: date, location, name of leader &/or other participants or head judge's name
- Judging Coordinator's contact information: Terry Noxel (noxelts@aol.com) 100 Barton Rd, Windsor, NY 13865; 607-235-5872/home or 610-304-4419/cell