



A Tribute to My Friend Jim

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I've met a lot of people over the course of my life. Some I've scarcely noticed. Some have come and gone. Others have dramatically altered the course of my life.

And then there's Jim Story.

Back in 1989 when I began writing for a small-town weekly newspaper in Fortville, Indiana, few people noticed. But one day, out of the blue, I got a phone call from a guy who'd called the newspaper and wheedled my number out of them, just because he wanted to tell me personally how much he enjoyed my writing.

Jim was always doing stuff like that. He never failed to go out of his way to thank someone, to congratulate someone, or to support someone in any way he could. Truth be told, that phone call was the nicest thing anything had ever done for me, but, for Jim, it was just the sort of thing he did every day. After that first contact, he called regularly to put me in touch with other writers, to recommend people who might be interested in my writing, and to introduce me to interesting people I might want to write about. Most of my best articles over the years were inspired in some way by Jim Story.

Jim and I shared a deep passion for gardening, and I, like so many others, soon adopted him into my family. My children admired him and enjoyed spending time with him. My husband, Bob, said he thought he should be jealous his wife was spending so much time with another man, but



mostly he was just jealous because I got to be with Jim more than he did.

Jim taught us all about the glory of gourds. Bob actually won awards for some of the photos he took of Jim's garden, and my daughter won an award for a beautiful portrait she painted of Jim's gourds. I published at least half a dozen articles about Jim's gourds—a few in *Better Homes and Gardens* magazines.

I, like so many other people, suffered a severe loss when Jim died. I sat alone at his funeral, wondering why I should even bother to write anything anymore. But Jim never would have allowed me to quit. Since his passing, I have continued to write, but I've sorely missed those regular phone calls I used to get, telling me how much he enjoyed my latest article.

When I finally got my first novel published two years ago, I was terribly excited, of course, and I gave copies to everyone I could think of who might care. But I couldn't give a copy to the one person I knew would care most.

So I buried a copy in my yard and planted gourds around it.

Somehow I'm sure Jim is enjoying it.

