



TDT'S COLLEGE OF USELESS KNOWLEDGE

CK/JT 201 James Taylor, The Early Years

James Vernon Taylor was born to Isaac & Gertrude Taylor on March 12, 1948, at Boston's Massachusetts General Hospital, where his father was a medical resident.

His mother studied singing at the New England Conservatory of Music & was an aspiring opera singer before the couple's marriage. Her love of music was encouraged in all her children, of which James was the second of five. All 4 of the other Taylor kids would also pursue music careers, each releasing their own albums, although none would reach the same heights as James.



In 1951, when James was three, the family moved to North Carolina when his father took a job as Assistant Professor of Medicine at the UNC School of Medicine. They built an elegant home in the sparsely populated Morgan Creek area. James would later say, "Chapel Hill, the Piedmont, the outlying hills, were tranquil, rural, beautiful, but quiet.

Thinking of the red soil, the seasons, the way things smelled down there, I feel as though my experience of coming of age there was more a

matter of landscape & climate than of people."

James attended public grade school in Chapel Hill. His father's career quickly prospered but he was frequently away from home, either on military service at Bethesda Naval Hospital in Maryland or as part of Operation Deep Freeze in Antarctica during 1955–1956. Mr. Taylor later became Dean of the UNC School of Medicine from 1964 to 1971, overseeing an enormous expansion of the school's hospital buildings & grounds, medical teaching facilities & curriculum.

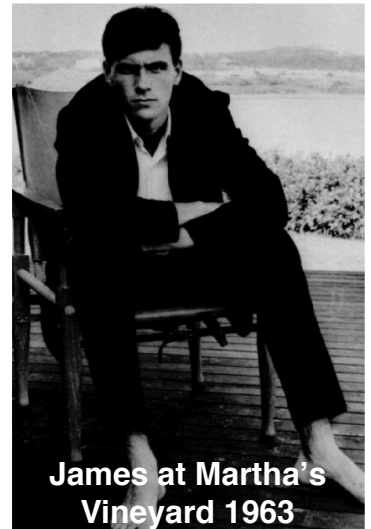
Taylor first learned to play the cello as a young child but switched to guitar in 1960. His style

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evolved from listening to hymns, carols & Woody Guthrie & his technique derived from his cello training & experimenting on his sister Kate's keyboards. "My style was a finger picking style that was meant to be like a piano, as if my thumb were my left hand, and my first, second & third fingers were my right hand."

The Taylor family lived very comfortably & none of the five kids wanted for a thing. They split their time between their plush rural estate in North Carolina & their Martha's Vineyard cottage, where they summered each year. There James met Danny "Kootch" Kortchmar, another aspiring teenage guitarist. The two began listening to & playing blues & folk music. Kortchmar quickly realized that Taylor's singing had a "natural sense of phrasing, every syllable beautifully in time, I knew James had that *thing*." Taylor wrote his first song on guitar at age 14 & continued to learn the instrument effortlessly. By the summer of 1963, he & Kortchmar were playing local events & coffeehouses around the Vineyard, billed as "Jamie & Kootch", even winning a local talent contest when they were just 15.



He began attending Milton Academy, a prestigious prep boarding school in Massachusetts in Fall 1961. The first 2 years sailed smoothly by but Taylor faltered during his junior year, no longer feeling at ease in the increasingly high-pressure & competitive college prep environment of privileged class kids. The Milton headmaster would later say, "James was more sensitive & less goal oriented than most students of his day." He returned home to North Carolina to finish out the semester at the public Chapel Hill High School. There he

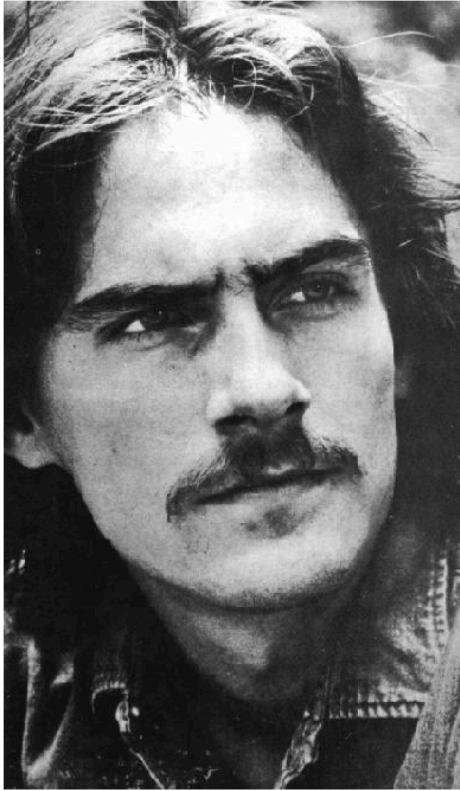


joined a band his brother Alex had formed called The Corsayers (later The Fabulous Corsairs), playing electric guitar. In 1964 they cut a single in Raleigh that featured James' song "Cha Cha Blues" on the B-side. His two & a half years away at Milton had caused James to lose touch with his former North Carolina grade school friends so he struggled through the remainder of his junior year isolated, alone & rudderless, except for his music.

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Taylor returned to Milton for his senior year but the few friends he'd had there had graduated or otherwise moved on so he was an outsider there as well. Friendless, alone & with no clear path into the future, he began to have bouts of depression.



Taylor started applying to Ivy League colleges but soon descended into a deep depression. His grades collapsed, he slept 20 hours a day & he felt part of, "a life that I was unable to lead." In late 1965, at the age of 17, he dropped out of school & committed himself to the renowned McLean Mental Institution in Belmont, Massachusetts, where he was treated with Thorazine & where the rigidly organized days gave him a sense of structure. As the Vietnam War escalated, Taylor received a psychological exemption from Selective Service when he appeared before the review board with two white-suited McLean orderlies & was uncommunicative. Taylor earned a high school diploma in 1966 from the hospital affiliated Arlington School. He would later view his nine month stay at McLean as "a lifesaver, like a pardon or a reprieve for a condemned man." Both his brother Livingston & sister Kate would later also be patients there. As for his recurring mental health struggles, Taylor would think of them

as innate & say, "It's an inseparable part of my personality that I have these feelings."

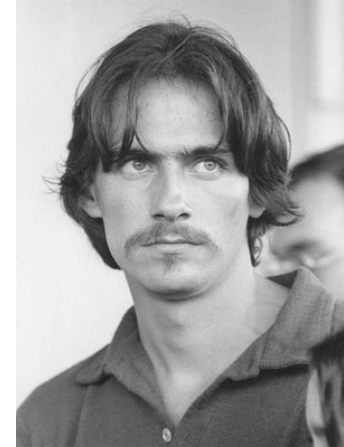
Taylor checked himself out of McLean against medical advice & at Kortchmar's urging, moved to New York City to form a new band. They recruited Joel O'Brien to play drums, formerly of Kortchmar's old band The King Bees, & James' childhood friend Zachary Wiesner to play bass. After Taylor rejected naming the group after himself, they called themselves The Flying Machine. They played songs that Taylor had written, while at & about McLean, such as, "Knocking 'Round the Zoo", "Don't Talk Now" & "The Blues Is Just a Bad Dream." In other songs, Taylor romanticized his life, although he was plagued by constant, crippling self doubt. By summer 1966 they were performing regularly at the landmark Night Owl Cafe in Greenwich Village, alongside other up & coming acts The Turtles, The Blues Magoos, Jimi Hendrix, Petula Clark, The Righteous Brothers, The Lovin' Spoonful & The Mamas & The

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Papas who honored their time at the Night Owl in their hit song, "The Ballad of Mama Cass (Creeque Alley)."

*Zally said, Denny, you know there aren't many
Who can sing a song the way that you do (let's go south)
Denny said, Zally, golly don't you think that I wish
I could play guitar like you
Zal, Denny and Sebastian sat (at the Night Owl)
And after every number they'd pass the hat
McGuinn and McGuire still a-gettin higher in LA
(you know where that's at)
And no one's gettin' fat except Mama Cass*



Taylor ran with an unsavory crowd, began using heroin regularly, despite Kortchmar's vehement objections, & wrote the "Paint It Black" influenced "Rainy Day Man" to depict his drug experience. In a hasty recording session in late 1966, the group cut a single, Taylor's "Brighten Your Night with My Day" backed with his "Night Owl". Released on Jay Gee Records it received limited radio airplay in the Northeast, but only charted to #102 nationally. During the same session they'd recorded several other songs, but the label was unimpressed

& declined to release an album. After a series of poorly chosen appearances outside New York, culminating in a three week stay at a failing nightspot in Freeport, Bahamas, for which they were never paid, The Flying Machine broke up. In 1969, a British band of the same name had a hit with the song, "Smile a Little Smile for Me, (Rosemary)". The New York band's recordings were later released in 1971 as James Taylor & the Original Flying Machine.

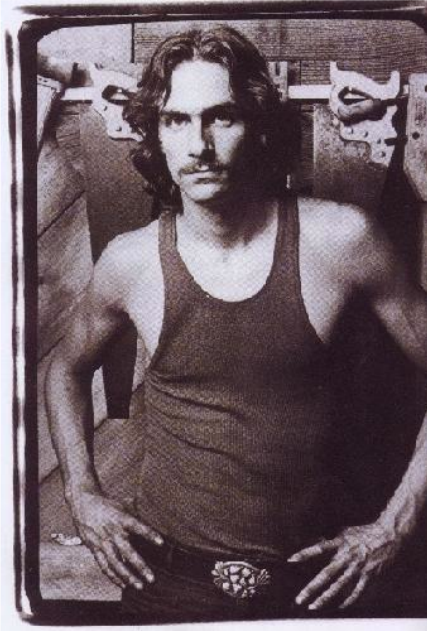


Taylor would later say of this New York period, "I learned a lot about the music business & too much about drugs." Indeed, his drug use had developed into a full blown heroin addiction during the final Flying Machine period. "I just fell into it, since it was just as easy to get high in the Village as to get a drink." He hung out in Washington Square Park, playing guitar each day to ward off depression & then passing out, allowing runaways & criminals to crash in his apartment. Finally out of money & abandoned by his fed up manager, he made a desperate

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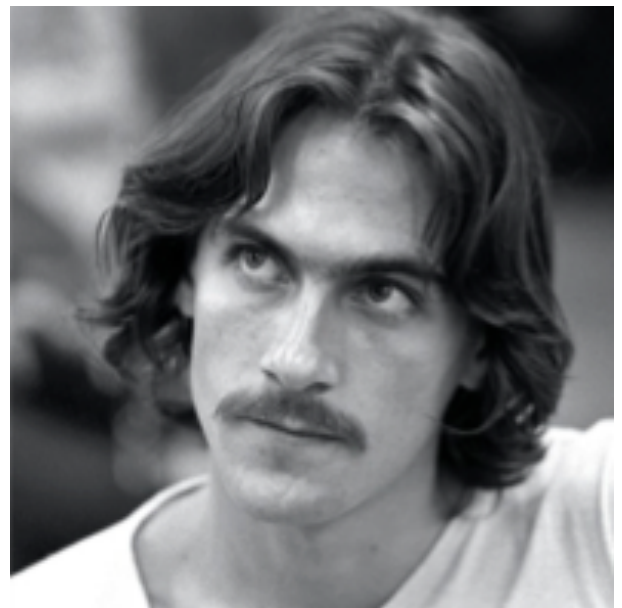
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call one night to his father. Isaac Taylor flew to New York & staged a rescue, rented a car & drove all night back to North Carolina with James & his few meager possessions. Taylor spent six months in treatment & made a shaky but tentative recovery. He also underwent throat surgery to repair damaged vocal cords from singing too harshly.



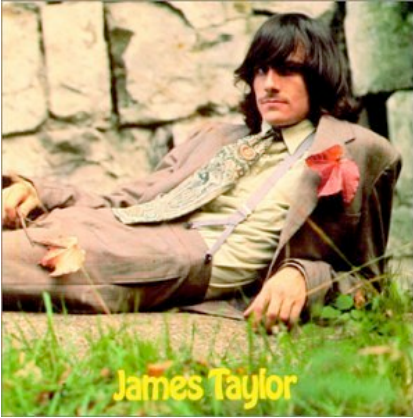
Clean for the first time in several years, Taylor decided to try the music business again, but this time as a solo act. For a change of luck & scenery, & funded by a small family inheritance, he moved to London in late 1967. He recorded some demos in Soho & based on Kortchmar's connection of The King Bees having once opened for Peter & Gordon, brought them to Peter Asher who was by then the A&R head for the Beatles' Apple Corp record label. Asher played the demos for Paul McCartney, who later said, "I heard his voice & his guitar & I thought he was great & then he came & played for us live, so it was just like, Wow, he *is* great." Taylor became the first non-British act to be signed by Apple.

Living chaotically in various places & with various women, Taylor wrote additional material, including "Carolina in My Mind" & rehearsed with a new backing band. Taylor recorded the album from July to October 1968 at Abbey Road Studios while The Beatles were recording their White Album. McCartney & an uncredited George Harrison guested on "Carolina in My Mind" whose line, '*with a holy host of others standing around me*', is a reference to the world's greatest backup artists, Paul & George with John & Ringo looking on. The title of Taylor's song "Something in the Way She Moves" provided the opening line for Harrison's Beatles' classic, "Something."



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During the recording sessions Taylor slid back into his drug habit, using heroin & methadone. He underwent treatment in a British program, returned to New York & was hospitalized there. He finally committed himself to the Austen Riggs Center in Stockbridge, Massachusetts which emphasized cultural & historical factors in treating psychiatric disorders & addictions. Meanwhile, Apple released his debut album, *James Taylor*, in December 1968 in the UK & in February 1969 in the US. Critical reaction was good, including a glowing review in Rolling Stone

which said, "This album is the coolest breath of fresh air I've inhaled in a good long while. It knocks me out." The record's commercial potential suffered from Taylor's inability to tour to promote it, due to his hospitalization, so it sold poorly. "Carolina in My Mind" was released as a single, but failed to chart in the UK & only made it to #118 in the US.

By this time The Beatles were nearing the end of their time as a group & Apple Corps itself had fallen into chaos, with ill advised business decisions & scores of freeloaders taking advantage of it from every direction. In mid 1969, three of the Beatles hired Allen Klein to clean house & he immediately began purging unnecessary Apple personnel. Klein quickly clashed with Asher who resigned to manage Taylor. Klein threatened Taylor with a \$5 million breach of contract lawsuit but Paul, & then the other three Beatles, overruled him on grounds that artists shouldn't hold each other to contracts.

In July 1969 Taylor parlayed the limited success of the album into a successful six night stand at the famous Troubadour in Hollywood. Later that summer he performed at the Newport Folk Festival as the very last act of the 3 day event & was cheered wildly by thousands of fans who stayed in the rain to hear him. Shortly thereafter, he broke both hands & feet in a motorcycle accident on Martha's Vineyard & was unable to play for several months. During his recovery, he continued to write songs & in October 1969, signed a record deal with Warner Brothers. The success he had struggled so long & hard for appeared to be at his fingertips, if only he could control his personal demons long enough to grasp it.

