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Jim at his Paris supper club.
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Dinner with Jim

—
[JIM HAYNES]

Author, publisher, theatre-founder,
festival-goer & Sunday dinner host

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[WRITES]

Kris McIntyre, Gen.a

Jim Haynes has taken the concept of showing generosity to a stranger to an extraordinary level. His open invitation to Sunday lunch in his Parisian home has seen more than 130,000 people from around the world bask in his unusually open-minded generosity.

A few years ago I enrolled in the Philosophy of Happiness course at Sydney University. An off-hand comment from the lecturer about an old tradition of inviting a stranger to dinner "as an act of generosity and to expand your world view" inspired me to host regular Monday mystery dinners. Once a month I would invite two friends who each brought a mystery guest.

That was how I met my dear friend, Kate Bezar. As the founding editor of 'dumbo feather' magazine, Kate met many remarkable people including Jim Haynes.

Now 78, American-born Jim has made getting to know people his life's work. He loves people and he loves life. Art, theatre, culture, literature and conversation have been central themes in his life. He also likes to stir the pot – politically and culturally. Jim was a leading figure of London's alternative 'underground' arts and culture scene in the 1960s. He was founder of the Paperback Bookshop in Edinburgh, co-founder of London's Drury Arts Lab and the alternative newspaper International Times and Suck magazine. He was also a key player in the foundation of Edinburgh's Traverse Theatre and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. He's authored a number of books and published many more. And then there are his dinners.

Over the past 35 years, Jim has opened the doors to his Parisian home/studio to anyone who'd like to come for Sunday dinner. Anyone can turn up and they do. Between 60 and 120 guests come every Sunday (with the exception of the two or three weeks that Jim attends the Edinburgh Festival) for a feast prepared by a different friend.

To date more than 130,000 people from around the world have accepted Jim's invitation. They range from 20 to 80 years of age, and include expats, travelers, artists and scientists. Jim says a typical mix of guests might include: a Dutch political cartoonist, a beautiful painter from Norway, a truck driver from Arizona, a bookseller from Atlanta, a newspaper editor from Sydney, students from all over and traveling retirees. Some return again and again and Jim says many love affairs, friendships, babies and jobs have been borne out of the event.

A true citizen of the world, Jim believes in introducing people to people. And his underlying premise is the very sentiment that could change the world.

"I have long believed that it is unnecessary to understand others, individuals or nationalities; one must, at the very least, simply tolerate others. Tolerance can lead to respect and, finally, to love. No one can ever really understand anyone else, but you can love them or at least accept them," Jim says.

Bookings are essential for Jim's Sunday night dinners. He suggests a donation of €25 (AU\$38) but will accept more or less. Any profits go to charity or to help finance the publication of books through his publishing house, Handshake. www.jim-haynes.com

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