

Taylor, James ^[1]

James Taylor

1948-

by Emily Horton
NC Government & Heritage Library ^[2], 2012.

Singer-songwriter James Taylor was born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1948 to Gertrude and Isaac Taylor. Taylor’s family moved to [Chapel Hill](#) ^[3], North Carolina when he was three years old. His father served as the Dean of the [University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill medical school](#) ^[4] from 1964 to 1971. Taylor grew up playing music with his four siblings, Alex, Kate, Livingston, and Hugh.

Taylor’s childhood home was on [Morgan Creek Road](#) ^[5] in [Chapel Hill-Carrboro](#) ^[6]. In April, 2003, a bridge over [Morgan Creek](#) ^[7] was dedicated to the musician, and renamed the James Taylor Bridge. Taylor’s childhood experiences in this neighborhood heavily impacted many of the lyrics in some of Taylor’s most popular songs. “Copperline” tells the story of Taylor’s return to his childhood stomping grounds, where it was just a ‘half a mile down to Morgan Creek’, and is now ‘all spec house and plywood’. “Carolina in My Mind”, Taylor’s “tribute song to his home state” is “known and loved by countless Carolinians.” ^[i]

In an interview in 2000, Taylor told *The Charlotte Observer* ^[8], “What I remember most about Chapel Hill is the landscape. I tell my kids that we were pre-TV and there was a lot of empty time there, slow weekends when you just walked into the woods and found whatever you could to kill time. There was this long, uninterrupted time to let your imagination grow. I believe that was an important part of whatever creative life I’ve had.” ^[ii]

It wasn’t until he left for boarding school at [Milton Academy](#) ^[9] in Massachusetts that he began experimenting with writing his own music. He experienced severe depression being so far from home and briefly returned to North Carolina, where he attended Chapel Hill High School. During this time, Taylor formed a band called the *Fabulous Corsairs* with his brother Alex and three friends in the mid 1960’s, but then returned to Milton Academy to finish school. After voluntarily committing himself to [McLean Psychiatric Hospital](#) ^[10] in Belmont, MA to treat his severe depression, Taylor moved to New York City after his release.

While in New York City, Taylor formed the band The Flying Machine, although the band did not stay together long. Taylor then moved to London, where he impressed [Peter Asher](#) ^[11] of [Apple Records](#) ^[12] with his demo tapes. In London, Taylor recorded his debut self-titled album *James Taylor* ^[13] (1968), and then moved to Los Angeles to record *Sweet Baby James* ^[13] (1970). *Sweet Baby James* ^[13] brought Taylor worldwide fame and success as it achieved triple platinum status. This album was nominated for the Album of the Year [Grammy Award](#) ^[14], and established James Taylor as a respected musician.

James Taylor has earned over forty gold, platinum, and multi-platinum awards throughout his career. Taylor’s third album *Mud Slide Slim and the Blue Horizon* ^[15] (1971), won a [Grammy](#) ^[14] for Best Pop Male Vocal for the song “You’ve Got a Friend” in 1971. Joni Mitchell, Taylor’s girlfriend at the time and popular folk musician, helped record background vocals on this album. Taylor married Carly Simon in 1972 before the release of *One Man Dog* ^[13] (1972), which included background vocals from Simon, songwriter-songwriters Carol King and Linda Ronstadt. He also recorded *Walking Man* ^[13] (1974), *Gorilla* ^[13] (1975), *In the Pocket* ^[13] (1976), and *JT* ^[13] (1977), which received a [Grammy](#) ^[14] for Best Male Pop Performance for the song “Handyman.” In 1978, Taylor collaborated with Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel to record “Wonderful World” for Garfunkel’s record. Following the releases of *Flag* ^[13] (1979) and *Dad Loves His Work* ^[13] (1981), Taylor and Simon [divorce](#) ^[15] d in 1983. He married Kathryn Walker in 1985. This was followed by the release of *Never Die Young* ^[13] (1988) and *New Moon Shine* ^[13] (1991). In between *New Moon Shine* ^[13] and *Hourglass* ^[13] (1997) which won a [Grammy award](#) ^[14] for “Best Pop Album”, Taylor divorced from Walker in 1995. In 2002, he released *October Road* ^[13].

Through his career, Taylor has received many awards, including honorary doctorates of music from [Williams College](#) ^[16] and the [Berklee School of Music](#) ^[17].

Below are some other notable achievements throughout Taylor’s musical career:

1978: Nominated for a Tony Award with seven others for Best Score for the Broadway musical “Working.”

1994: Earned the [Recording Industry Association of American’s Diamond Award](#) ^[18] for his *Greatest Hits Volume 1* ^[13] album for selling over 10 million records

1998: Won *Billboard’s* ^[19] Century Award for his distinguished achievement in the arts

1998: Honored with the [North Carolina Fine Arts Award](#) ^[20]

2000: Inducted into the [Rock and Roll Hall of Fame](#) ^[21] and the [Songwriters Hall of Fame](#) ^[22]

2006: Designated Person of the Year by [MusiCares](#) ^[23]; Won a World Soundtrack Award for Best Original Song Written for Film, which was written for the animated film *Cars* ^[24].

2007: Received [Emmy](#) ^[25] nomination for Outstanding Variety, Music, or Comedy Special for his album *One Man Band* ^[13]

2011: President Obama awarded him the [National Medal of Arts](#) ^[26]; [Carnegie Hall](#) ^[27] presented four concerts to honor James Taylor in the *Perspectives* series

Throughout his career, Taylor has made many television appearances, including: *“Late Show with David Letterman”* ^[28], *CBS This Morning* ^[30], *The Tonight Show* ^[31], *Sesame Street* ^[32], and *Saturday Night Live* ^[33], among others.

James Taylor has been actively involved in political campaigning since the 1970’s, when he supported [Jimmy Carter’s](#) ^[34] presidential campaign in 1976, and campaigned four years later for John Anderson in 1980. In 2008, he returned to North Carolina to perform a series of concerts to campaign for Obama’s presidential election campaign. Taylor played in Charlotte, Asheville, Chapel Hill, Raleigh, and Wilmington to support Obama.

Taylor married Caroline “Kim” Smedvig in 2001, and together they have two sons, Henry and Rufus. He also has two children, Ben and Sally, from his previous marriage to [Carly Simon](#) ^[35]. Taylor currently lives in Massachusetts with his family.

^[1] NC Awards, Digital Collections, Government & Heritage Library, State Library of North Carolina. Accessed March 19, 2012. <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/documents?search=%22%22north%20carolina%20wards%22%22&searchtypes=MetadataFull%20text&applyState=true> ^[20]

^[ii] Mike Ragogna, “James Taylor to “Stand & Fight” for Barak Obama in North Carolina.” *Huffington Post*, October 16, 2008. Accessed March 19, 2012. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/james-taylor-to-stand-fight_b_135134 ^[36]

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Additional Resources:

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1 January 2012 | Horton, Emily S.

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