

Q&A WITH PETER LEE

Author of *The Death and Life of Mal Evans*

Why did you write this book?

I've always been fascinated with the "What if" aspect of the Beatles. They broke up in the prime of their careers, with so much more music left in them. This book is my attempt to guess what would have happened if they continued making music together.

What made you pick Mal Evans as the central character?

Mal was present for everything but is virtually unknown among the general public. He even tried writing his own memoirs but died before it was published. So his story has never been told. He was the perfect narrator, always present, but quiet and unassuming.

The Death and Life of Mal Evans is your first novel. What's the process been like?

It's been exhausting. It started out as a nonfiction book, then went through several rewrites. I've read dozens of books, hundreds of articles – so much research has gone into this book. It was one of those projects where I worked on it for a few weeks, then put it away for a few months. I got serious about publishing it last year, and the final push – editing, printing, marketing – has been a learning experience.

This is a novel, but it involves real characters. How does that work?

It's like Stephen King's *11/22/63*, in which a character goes back in time to try to prevent the Kennedy assassination: The characters are real, and some of the events really happened, but the context in which they happen are completely different. I've taken some liberty with the events to make my own story and play out the "What if?" scenario, and I point out in the end which things were real and what was made up.

How difficult was it to get in the heads of real people like the Beatles and give their characters life?

I had a lot of help from biographies and interviews – they gave me a lot of insight into each Beatle's personality. I then applied that to the story, asking myself, "What would Paul say here?" and "How would John react to that?"

Mal, though, was a little tougher. There's not much about him – I just knew he was referred to as "the Gentle Giant," and there were a few articles in which he's mentioned. But his character grew from that nickname.

Do you think the Beatles would have ever gotten back together if John had lived?

Possibly so, but probably not. They were too proud of their legacy, and they would have seen other groups reunite and try to keep the old flame alive and realize that was not for them. However, I would not have counted out some collaborations – John and Paul were on friendly terms at the time of John’s death. I would hope that they would have somehow worked together again.

Who are your favorite authors?

Dave Eggers, who wrote *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, and Nick Hornby, who has written several books with music as the theme or subject.

Where do you do most of your writing?

Surprisingly, I find Starbucks a perfect place to write. I love the constant movement, the busy pace, the background music – it creates a bit of white noise for me that allows me to concentrate on writing and tune everything else out.

What advice do you have for aspiring authors?

Write, write, write. Keep a journal. Start a book of your own. A mentor once told me, “If you don’t write, you’re not a writer.”