I read the news today oh boy

Courtesy of David Bieber/Bieber Archives (1973 photo)

This is especially hard for me to write because John Lennon was no more or less special or influential to me than he was to millions of others. Certainly, he no more put words into my mouth than he put them into the mouths of those hundreds of thousands who joined me in perennial pilgrimages to Washington, where we would huddle together chanting, "All we are saying is give peace a chance." Over and over again.

That may not have been his most poetic line but, damn it, it certainly did say it. And that's what John Lennon did for me. He wrote and sang simple, straightforward lyrics that seemed to crystallize my confused, contradictory post-adolescent thoughts about — well, about nearly everything. I loved him for it.

All the lonely people, where do they all come from?
All the lonely people, where do they all belong?

Living is easy with eyes closed, misunderstanding all you see
It's getting hard to be someone but it all works out — it doesn't matter much to me.

At times he even expressed my vague, half-considered thoughts in a deliberately inarticulate manner that I found somehow comforting.

That is you can't, you know, tune in but it's all right
That is I think it's not too bad

Or he would just say things that needed to be said, precisely when I was ready to hear them.

You can wear a mask and paint your face
You can call yourself the human race
You can wear a collar and a tie
One thing you can't hide is when you're crippled inside

All John Lennon did, really, was show me how to dress outrageously, how to grow my hair, and — again, in very direct and *simple* terms — how and what to think. That's all.

All you need is love
Love is all you need

One thing I can tell you is you've got to be free

I guess all this made me something of a '60s airhead, a lemming, a blind follower of trends and platitudes. I am willing, with some embarrassment, to admit that I spent more time and energy than I should have sitting around in a stoned stupor trying to find profound hidden meanings and heavy answers to imponderable questions in Beatle lines about rocking-horse people going around eating marshmallow pies and the like.

Elementary penguin singing Hare Krishna man you should have seen them kicking Edgar Allan Poe

I don't know whether that makes me the walrus or the eggman or what. I do know that this very same John Lennon brought me right back to earth, with a bit of a thud, the day he erased my thoughts about marijuana as the key to deeper meanings and insights by blithely dismissing the stuff as "a silly little giggle." I also know that while some may dismiss the '60s as a time of naive notions, simple solutions, and drug-drenched decadence, I'll always remember those years as joyous and truly liberating.

I needed John and Yoko's full-frontal-nude album cover, just as I needed their week-long "bed-ins" and erotic art. I don't know whether John, Paul, George, and Ringo were more popular than Christ. I do know that they created a force — a magical, mystical force if you will — strong enough to help me break those terrible bonds of Christian guilt that had held me down since Sunday School.

Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too

No, I'm not the dreamer I once was. I don't think pop singers have the answers to much of anything. I know that you need more than love to get by (but without it, what's the point?) and that, dammit, the world is not about to live as one. With or without John Lennon.

I still know how to imagine, though, and I trust I'm not the only one. Just as I'm sure I'm not the only one who remembers the angry, political edge to those Lennon lyrics that were instantly absorbed into my own politics.

Keep you doped with religion and sex and TV
And you think you're so clever and classless and free
But you're still fuckin' peasants as far as I can see
A working-class hero is something to be

Or my beliefs were reflected in John Lennon's words. They came together so neatly that I can no longer remember which came first.

— Dave O'Brian

At the ends of centuries, Western societies grow decadent. A mood sets in: nihilistic, impersonal, sensation-hungry, cruel — the *fin de siecle* mood. Just as the Leopold-Loeb killing was *the* murder of the '20s, the one that summed up the boom era before the crash; just as the Lindbergh kidnaping was *the* Depression-era crime; and just as the assassinations of the Kennedys and Martin Luther King typified the '60s — so the murder of John Lennon introduces us to the dark side of the '80s. It's a *fin de siecle* horror.

For the last 20 years or so, John Lennon wore the *zeitgeist* as comfortably as an old coat. When Beatlemania struck, he was a Beatle; when people took acid, he saw Lucy in the sky; when they got religion, he found himself a guru; when politics became voguish, he wrote "Revolution"; as Vietnam dragged on, he sang "Give Peace a Chance." He was the loudest primal screamer, and when the children of the '60s went back to the land, he became interested in Holsteins. Lately — you guessed it: real estate. John Lennon *was* the history of the last two decades.

And that's what's scariest. Lennon's murder was the catastrophic — and perhaps inevitable — collision of our recent past with the present, of the child of the '60s with that monstrous and typical creature of the '80s, the celebrity hound. Lennon had spent the last five years trying very hard not to be a celebrity. When he resurfaced as John Lennon Superstar, he met Mark David Chapman, Mr. 1980, the kid who might ask you for your autograph one minute and shoot you dead the next — and not really understand the difference. Maybe Chapman heard voices. Maybe he thought he *was* John Lennon (his wife is said to resemble Yoko Ono). Certainly his identity was all bound up with the image of Lennon, this image that had been the emblem of so much of his history, and the history of many another 25-year-old American kid. In asking for Lennon's autograph, Chapman must have felt he was somehow augmenting himself, and if he did shoot Lennon, he must have felt nearly the same thing — except that shooting is more powerful. "I shot John Lennon," Chapman is said to have yelped, and one remembers the legendary killers who had once boasted, "I shot Jesse James." This *People*-crazy culture has been feeding on celebrities for years, creating them, nurturing them, adoring them, and then turning on them. To us, the celebrities are mere projections of our loves and hates; we forget that we don't impinge on their lives the way they impinge on ours. Perhaps Chapman understood this when he asked for the autograph, when he looked into Lennon's face and recognized his idol as an independent being, as human not icon, as someone who didn't really *belong* to Mark David Chapman at all. These are hideously selfish times. We dehumanize our celebrities, and in that dehumanization bring ourselves closer and closer to a murderous decadence, to the *fin de siecle* temper that might admit any cruelty. Nineteen-eighty will be remembered as, among other things, the year in which adoring John Lennon and murdering him amounted to the same thing.

— Stephen Schiff

It is understandable that John Lennon, in death, would be lionized in a new wave of Beatlemania. Understandable but sad. John tried so desperately to distance himself from the mythology and deification that dehumanizes as it exalts.

This past week, as I'd done hundreds of times throughout the '70s, I turned to John's first album of post-Beatle songs, *Plastic Ono Band*, issued in 1970. And I listened over and over again to "God."

The Rolling Stone Record Guide says his singing on the last verse "may be the finest in all of rock." In any case, it's my favorite Lennon recording. It expresses with chilling clarity and beauty how John viewed himself and how he hoped to be accepted by his fans. It begins:

God is a concept
By which we measure our pain

He was delivering what to him was an important message, so he repeated it.

I'll say it again
God is a concept
By which we measure our pain

Then he issued a litany of false icons.

I don't believe in magic
I don't believe in I-Ching
I don't believe in Bible

Or tarot, or Hitler, or Jesus, or Kennedy, or Buddha, or mantra, or gita, or yoga, or kings, or Elvis, or Zimmerman. Or Beatles. So what did he believe in?

I just believe in me
Yoko and me
That's reality

And that's the way he would have had it. The Beatles era was behind him. Before him was a new life as husband and father and singer and songwriter and recording artist and resident of New York City. He yearned to be himself.

When I was in college, I studied religion with Dr. Theodore Mauch, a Methodist minister. More than religion, what he taught was humanism. He taught that Jesus was a person, not a god, and that we should rejoice because of it. He taught that to think of Jesus as anything more was to accept stultifying limits to human potential.

I thought about Dr. Mauch as I listened to "God." I wondered why the radios were not playing "God," and why the newspapers were not reprinting what I thought was John's most important message. I found it strange that the focus was on John Lennon, Beatle, and the Beatles, and not the John Lennon who spent his last 10 years as a human being who wrote and recorded much beautiful music. I liked the Beatles. But I came to love John Lennon, the John Lennon who in 1970 shared his idea of God, told us that it was okay to be vulnerable, to be confused.

How can I go forward when I don't know which way I'm facing?
How can I go forward when I don't know which way to turn?
How can I go forward into something I'm not sure of?

he sang on the 1971 *Imagine* album.

The man who spurned Beatlemania for life as a human being, the man who

wrote, "Nobody loves you when you're down and out/Nobody sees you when you're on cloud nine but/Everybody loves you when you're six feet in the ground" — this man would understand the adulation and excesses of the past week. He would not like it, but he would understand.

I don't believe in John Lennon.

I just miss him.

— Richard Gaines

The Beatles' music — never mind the critics' incessant harping on its roots, derivation, and influences — is for most of us the focus of what came before, during, and after its time. The Beatles themselves became the focus of more than pop music. They were unquestionably acknowledged to be on the right side of everything, assumed to champion the peace movement, the drug culture, and a lot of peculiar causes they neither knew about nor cared about. They were central to the lives of millions. They evoked a level of identification unparalleled in pop culture. They served as the background and instigation for '60s politics. Millions of kids, unsure of themselves, were sure the Beatles knew something important. We projected our beliefs onto them, and read our neuroses and our purest ideals into their lyrics.

Watching the subway crowd the morning after Lennon's death, I could pick out the people who understood what had happened (and what was happening) the way I did. It was easy. The ones who didn't were older. Lennon hadn't been a touchstone for their system of values. Whose death, I asked myself, could affect as many of my parents' generation so strongly? Sinatra? Valentino had for a still older generation. But Lennon was more than a sex symbol, more than a beloved performer, much more than a memory of his audience's youth. Is there anyone so much a part of our parents' lives, so indispensable to their emotional security? It's a loaded question, of course. That Lennon died violently and unexpectedly had a lot to do with the strength of our reaction. It's sad when heroes die of old age. It's apocalyptic when their deaths play like B movies.

It doesn't matter that John Lennon was roughly a decade older than his oldest fans, or that Yoko Ono is the same age as my mother. The senselessness and tragedy of his death are appreciated most by the young, those of us for whom personal reality and media are closest, the generation whose values are drawn from and reflected in its entertainment. And it doesn't surprise me (although it seems to astound the TV newspeople) that people responded to Lennon's murder by gathering in spontaneous vigils or hanging flowers on the gate of the Dakota. Lennon and the Beatles were most popular at a time when he talked relentlessly about relevance. Eventually the times made Lennon relevant. And so his death is relevant to a lot of people who haven't met in years.

— Clif Garboden

Lord knows, we should be used to murder in public by now, and yet still it transforms. I've been wondering since that unfathomable Monday night what the response would have been had Lennon been shot before *Double Fantasy* and the *Playboy* interview — before, in other words, he returned to the scene of his greatest triumphs, the media. Ironic, isn't it, that John, surely one of the most commanding media presences of our time, should, in death, be transformed by the media into something almost — dare I say it? — Christlike. As if he had never been a wealthy asshole, though I suspect that two weeks ago these might have been among the first few words on anyone's lips in talking about him. Ironic enough that I think John might laugh that marvelous sardonic laugh of his. I mean, just gimme some truth.

And yet I'm falling victim to the ironies too, since I haven't yet written the first thing I said to people the next day, after the reality had begun to sink in, after I had begun to accept that we weren't going to be able to watch John grow old — for better or worse. Certainly I was rooting for him; so few rockers have aged gracefully, and it would be nice to think that it's possible. But what I said to friends the next day had nothing to do with Lennon the media presence, or with Lennon the musician, or even with Lennon the man who made as much of an ass of himself in the public eye as anyone I can think of. It had to do with John Lennon, 40-year-old man, and his truest triumph, his most human triumph — the romantic victory of his relationship with Yoko and, in the last five years, with Sean. Victory, because in the face of the most incredible juvenile hostility — Yoko broke up the Beatles and all that garbage — they endured. And changed. And perhaps, finally, in John's death, prevailed. I only hope that I can do as well.

— Howard Litwak

For a moment, just a moment, after hearing Howard Cosell announce John Lennon's death with the same extreme unction he had used to describe Steve Grogan's knees, I thought about what a friend once told me about the Devil: the Archfiend's subterfuge in modern times would be to convince us he doesn't exist.

I haven't really thought much about the Devil since I was a gullible five-year-old, but when I lived in New York, only three blocks away from the Dakota, that huge castle of the enchanted gentry seemed a plausible place for the Devil to reside. Heinz, the Dakota's doorman, would occasionally show gawkers the exact spots where the bodies were supposed to have fallen in *Rosemary's Baby*, most of which was shot on location in the Dakota.

A Gothic celebrity condo, complete with gargoyles and tiny moat, it had seemed an odd yet logical place for John Lennon to choose as his fortress of domesticity. Perhaps it was his version of the wealthy Brit-rocker's ancestral home.

I used to pass by the Dakota at least once a day on my way to the subway, and I often found myself looking up, trying to catch a glimpse of a famous face at a window. Sometimes, if I was on the other side of the street, I would cross over so I could walk by the archway to the courtyard and peer in. I never considered myself at all akin to the obsessed groupies, paparazzi, or autograph hounds who were always lurking nearby. I was just mildly curious. But as I think back, it seems that all of us who walked by the Dakota, morning and night, looking up in envy or desire, must have cut through those brick walls like a laser beam. The hero, like a lightning rod, draws upon himself the evil energies of the world.

— Carol Flake

Meet the Turntables!

(1965)

Name: Stephs
Age: 13
Birthplace: Shrewsbury, Massachusetts
Height: 5-foot-7
Weight: 135 pounds
Hair: black
Eyes: brown
Plays: percussion (typewriter case, cowbell, toolbox, tackle box, and tarnished brass lampshade)
Sings: "Twist and Shout," "This Boy," "I Want To Hold Your Hand"

Name: Price
Age: 13
Birthplace: Shrewsbury, Massachusetts
Height: 5-foot-6
Weight: 130 pounds
Hair: black
Eyes: brown
Plays: guitar (yardstick run through *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Volume XIII)
Sings: "You Can't Do That," "I'm Down," "Can't Buy Me Love"

Name: Dave
Age: 14
Birthplace: Shrewsbury, Massachusetts
Height: 5-foot-6
Weight: 135 pounds
Hair: blond
Eyes: blue
Plays: guitar (yardstick run through *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Volume XIV)
Sings: "Help," "A Hard Day's Night," "I Should Have Known Better."

Name: Chas
Age: 12
Birthplace: Shrewsbury, Massachusetts
Height: 5-foot-4
Weight: 130 pounds
Hair: brown
Eyes: gray
Plays: bass guitar (long-handled dustmop or broom, as available)
Sings: "I Saw Her Standing There," harmonies

The Turntables brought the Shrewsbury Sound to the world that summer of 1965. Some people resisted them because of their surface similarity to the Beatles (particularly when the record skipped), but these fans were soon won over indeed. The Shrewsbury Sound came out of the cellars. It was usually Price's cellar, but Dave let the boys use his when Price's parents got mad . . . .

Both Price and Dave actually learned to play guitar. Dave got married, had a kid, got divorced, and joined the Navy. Price still plays in rock 'n' roll bands. His friends never hear about them until it is too late and the bands have already changed their names.

Stephs is a pharmacist and my best friend. Not even I call him that any more. He is 28 years old, and he still has a complete collection of Beatle bubble-gum cards in his room at his parents' house. I used to kid him about the cards, back in the days when I believed that there was no more of my childhood left to be killed.

I'm 27. My nickname is the only one that stuck.

— Charles P. Pierce

It's impossible for me to discern where John Lennon ends and where the rest of us begin. And at a time as frustratingly powerless as this past week, the possibilities that he cracked open are a comfort as well as a source of horror, a horror that cuts two ways. Undoubtedly, we miss any cultural totem who changed us as much as he did. But the equal loss would be our thinking of John Lennon only as an abstraction, only someone whose life was such a convenient mirror of the times.

I like to think that it was John's brutal, bull-headed restlessness that dragged us along with him from moptop to acidhead to pacifist to primal screamer to urban

Continued on page 26

The news

Continued from page 7

guerrilla to househusband. A succession of phases as disparate as that becomes coherent only as a product of John's refusal to settle for anything, his natural suspicion of facile answers. And a wild, lasting need to make his voice heard; even when his role of contented spouse finally let him stop asking questions, he still had to send a letter from home.

If the '60s made John Lennon seem an instinctively correct hero, it was because a generation that was just beginning to learn how to ask questions had found someone who had always done so as a matter of course. Formally, his disdain for complacence shaped the gleefully casual way that the Beatles trashed pop music's limits — from chord structures to sonic textures and to their insistence on self-sufficiency. Much more profound, though, is the consistency of the line that one can draw through all of Lennon's best works. Behind them all was a hardness, a refusal to compromise whether he was singing love songs full of uncertainty and distance or imagist songs so visceral that they had the immediacy of love songs. "There's a Place," among the first tracks the Beatles laid down for Parlophone, just might be the most gorgeous lie in all of rock 'n' roll. The singers insist on the existence of "a place where I can go/when I feel low/when I feel blue" and admit that it only exists in their minds. But maybe it's not a lie at all. For its two minutes, John's keening harmonica, his and Paul's linked, soaring harmonies, the light, swift beat — they make you believe that the song itself *is* the secret shelter. Dozens of Lennon's other songs have an equal breadth of emotion, a comparably deep commitment: the playful, scary "I Am the Walrus" rolling off the tongue as recklessly as John's beloved "Be-Bop-a-Lula" did; the frighteningly direct "Don't Let Me Down," a love song posed as a threat. But this past week, it's been easier to live inside the promise of "There's a Place."

As willfully as the way he shaped our lives with his dissatisfaction, his wild humor, the song that summons John Lennon most vividly for me is one that he had no hand in creating. That song is Rosie and the Originals' "Angel Baby," released in 1960 and one that John always counted among his favorites. Right from the start, everything is a little too vivid: the guitar arcs too high, a piano rumbles in slightly off-key, the drums set a snail's pace, letting every rough edge linger in front of you. A shy, unsingerly woman's voice noses its way in, so beside herself with gratitude — for her lover, for the chance to sing this song — that she keeps sliding into a falsetto, as if no note could be high enough. Midway, a saxophone, deep and raw, steps forward, stunning the rest of the band so much that they drop a beat. This song, played with all the nerve, all the emotion that men and women can muster, feels to me like John's ideal.

And it's no longer his standard alone. Graham Parker hanging onto his microphone like a safety ladder, Elvis Costello trapped, in his own words, "between tenderness and brute force," John Lydon denying pleasure even as he relinquishes it: if John Lennon is dead, so are they. Killing him, it would seem, is a more complex matter than simply gunning him down.

— Mark Moses

I remember the day someone brought the white album to the dorm room where SDS held its meetings. Along with it

Continued on page 28

The news

Continued from page 26

came the new issue of some radical newspaper or other, with its front page devoted to a review of the record. One of the left opportunists put on side one; someone else began reading, interrupting a song now and again to declaim a particularly stirring sentiment. The review was favorable — surprisingly favorable, in fact, considering the kiss-off that "Revolution" represented.

The paper was passed from hand to hand, but each reader was a little less avid than the last. And somewhere around — oh, around "Happiness Is a Warm Gun," I guess, when the review was passed to me, I put it down unread.

I took it up again later, of course. I was not quite fool enough, even then, to let 16-page newspapers dictate my political line, but I was always eager to know what their line on my line was. This review maintained its political line only about as long as we had maintained our interest in reading; at some popnt the writer simply gave up and proclaimed that the Beatles had made a terrific album, one with a whole lot of good songs and not that many losers.

John Lennon was much more than a great pop artist, but he was more than that because he was that. He invented hippie success — the psychedelic Rolls, the mystification, the capes and the white suits and the epaulets — because he needed to invent *something*, some style in which to act out his very real success. He was able to challenge us to trash our received ideas because he was himself so relentless in his questioning. But none of these virtues would have changed anyone's life if he had not been able to put them into good songs and terrific albums. Even his incredible generosity — his willingness to give away his doubts and fears and half-formed images of hope and love — would have meant less if his gifts had been less precious.

The night after John Lennon died, I got a call from a friend who had listened to the white album in that dorm room. He told me that after two years of being an unemployed doctor of philosophy, he was going to Brazil to teach "philosophy of culture." He told me that another friend had left his Communist splinter party, after 10 years of organizing, because he no longer believed in "that kind of party structure."

We all snorted when John sang, "You better free your mind instead." But when the sing-along coda came around — "Bah-oom shoobie-doo-wop, bah-oom shoobie-doo-wop" — we all sang along.

We all want to change the world. John Lennon did.

— John Ferguson

I remember hearing the Beatles for the first time — it was "I Want To Hold Your Hand" on the radio at the Campus Sub Shop (now also gone), on Mass. Ave. near Porter Square. I remember wondering how they *ever* learned all the words. But I couldn't get those words, or that tune, or those voices, out of my head.

A song is so often connected to an event, helps one remember an event — but Beatles songs *were* events. I can remember sitting with friends in my graduate-school dormitory room, listening to *Rubber Soul* the day it came out, being dubious and bewildered, but hooked; and later having deep discussions about Keats, Shakespeare, modal harmonies — and just playing the record over and over. I was in London when *Revolver* came out. I heard it for the first time in a record shop's listening booth and got so excited I telephoned my friend Frank Bidart in Cambridge to talk about it. I remember keeping my transistor radio on all night to hear the new *Sgt. Pepper* songs before the album was released, and calling Frank, or being called, as soon as one came on. And gleefully steaming off the phony cover of the *Yesterday and Today* album (I must have steamed off at least five of them for friends in the dorm). I was even interviewed once, over a lobster lunch at Pier 4, by a *Time* reporter working on a Beatles cover story, who thought it was amazing that a graduate student in literature should love the Beatles. (I was never quoted.)

Now once again I won't be able to forget hearing the voice of John Lennon — *that voice*, with all its sympathy and sweetness, its candor, and, as with all the greatest singers, its unsettling ability to show pain — on the radio an hour after he was killed, singing: "I read the news today oh boy."

— Lloyd Schwartz

Ernie and I and the rest of us were big-shot cynical daily-newspaper reporters, equipped with the necessary collective wise mouth and certainly too old anyway to discern anything resembling music in the noise produced by the Beatles.

Ernie had been assigned to do a color piece on this latest rage and came back laughing almost uncontrollably, trying to describe how the teenagers overwhelmed the cops and how the four British wise guys took it all in stride and told funny jokes in the dressing room.

I responded that if four guys from a dump like Liverpool could attract thousands of screaming nutso teenagers not only to watch them, but to *pay* to watch them, more power to the Beatles.

One learns, as one grows older, that had the teenagers ever shut up for a minute during those years, we cynical older people would have heard some very fine and original music. And people who say they know about such things say that John Lennon was a musical genius.

I do not mourn John Lennon with the same intensity as others seem to do. I did not look upon him or the Beatles as a fount of philosophy or guidance counseling. I did not use their music to form my anti-Vietnam War opinions; for that, I turned to common sense. I did not seek out their songs for a philosophy of life; for this, I turned to neighborhood leaders and old books. I did not even listen to them for entertainment; we have a total of one Beatles record in our house and I can't remember its name.

The issue here is not whether John Lennon's death is followed by the kind of faddism that followed the deaths of Rudolph Valentino and Elvis Presley or whether he is elevated to the stature of such slain heroes as the Kennedy brothers, Martin Luther King, or the scores of well-known and little-known who died in the cause of civil rights.

The point is that John Lennon was a decent 40-year-old guy, too young to die by natural causes and too innocent to die by handgun. There's no question that his fame made him a more likely target, and this is frightening for anyone in the trades of sports, entertainment, or even journalism. The wife of a local musician is now worrying about whether her husband's dreams of fame will bring only similar tragedy.

It is undoubtedly no consolation to anyone to note what is so necessary to note whenever such a tragedy occurs. Every day and night in this nation, this republic so enamored of firepower, scores of people hardly anyone ever heard of are wasted by guns. A few nights before Lennon's murder, Mrs. Kenneth Prouty looked behind the bar counter at Bruno's Tavern in Buffalo — America's answer to Liverpool — and found her 33-year-old husband, the proprietor, shot to death. In addition to telling the police, she also had to tell four young kids. The story was undoubtedly barely noticed outside Buffalo. It was buried in the *New York Times*, occupying less than two inches of space.

I shall mourn John Lennon, and I shall mourn Kenneth Prouty and I shall mourn every innocent person who is at one moment full in the flush of life and at the next moment full with the awesome and confusing knowledge of suddenly dying from bullets that can be purchased by any screwball anywhere in this nation.

Our president-elect said he was very shocked indeed by the shooting of John Lennon. He said we have to do something about all this crime. He was also reported to have reservations about gun control. Maybe, then, the mourners are left with very few choices.

We could, perhaps, emigrate to a place like Liverpool — a very tough town, but one in which the Beatles would have been very much safer. Hardly anybody gets shot to death there.

Or we could, I suppose, get our own guns. If the thugs and screwballs and other assorted dropouts are intent on arming themselves, and if those in charge

Continued on page 30

The news —

Continued from page 28

of the asylum in Washington and the state capitals are indifferent, perhaps the rest of us might better arm.

That's a cruel lesson to draw from the death of a man who sang of peace and love.

— Alan Lupo

If it weren't for John Lennon, I certainly wouldn't be here as a music writer. I grew up in a musical household, and sat through a few lessons on piano and trumpet; I listened to the radio, but usually found it silly. Then "I Want To Hold Your Hand" hit me — and I knew I had to play guitar. Beatles songs were delightful to play, and I did hardly anything else all through high school.

The Beatles' music earned me my first tenuous contact with the opposite sex, too. I had extremely adolescent views of love and sex, shaped mostly by television and the movies. John cautioned that "love was more than just holding hands"; his lyrics alone hinted at the ambiguities of lust and fury in growing up. And he comforted me when I was a loser.

I pored over *In His-Own Write* and *A Spaniard in the Works*, and thus discovered surrealism. Soon my sense of humor began to disturb my friends and relatives. John blazed the trail for that mode of thought too, with "Tomorrow Never Knows," a powerful argument against the prosaism of the real world.

After the white album I kept getting weirder; my new mentors were Grace Slick and Frank Zappa. By 1972 I couldn't even stay with my band because of my obscure interests, so I began writing to publicize artists most people never heard of. Last week I might have argued that the pop stars of the '60s and most of the '70s were redundant and ought to have been put out to pasture years ago. But now I find that some values endure. John was always real, and I miss him.

— Michael Bloom

To me, John Lennon was like a mutual friend of a friend. We all had him in common, and we had our individual points of reference to him.

I was one of those unbearably brainwashed children who like things because their parents have told them to. While my sixth-grade class was rockin' out to the Beatles, I practiced the piano and liked classical music. I think that was when I began to realize I was brainwashed; John had something to do with that.

When I first moved to Boston, into my first apartment, I lived only a five-minute walk from the Holyoke Center plaza, where at night there were always a few hippie guys in Army jackets hanging around. One or two would softly offer "Acid, grass, speed?" whenever I passed. There was a war going on, I was about to become a born-again Communist, and a Janis Joplin concert was the highlight of my musical entertainment that fall. Most every morning, though, I woke up to the gentle guitars and voices of "Here Comes the Sun," which one of my roommates had ritually set aturn on my GE portable record player. I'd hear the music and open my eyes to look out the window, and by God, here *would* come the sun! And I was on my own; free; being offered acid, grass, speed; expecting the revolution any day. John had something to do with that.

A few years later and the Beatles had just split up. We were all pretty shocked about *that*. "Shit," said my friend Beth. "Some day the Beatles are going to be 40 years old. What are we going to *do* with them then?"

"Love them," another friend replied simply, immediately. John had something to do with that.

Except that we knew and maybe loved John Lennon, but John Lennon didn't know us. Technology, mass-media communications — such aspects of the modern world, incomprehensible despite their being taken for granted — helped make this one-sided situation possible, though we, too, took part in our "befriending" of John. Another consequence of those aspects of the world and of how his "friends" cared for him is that John Lennon is dead.

"The real truth of it," someone said yesterday evening, "is that his wife and child have been deprived of him." John couldn't possibly know and love us in the way we did him. But there are those whom he did know and love, and they have lost that.

We gain the end to a chapter; we gain a topic for morbid thought and conversation; we gain a chance to remember that we had a friend in common. Will our shared memory have anything to do with being better friends with one another?

— Barbara Wallraff

In all of pop music, John Lennon was the supreme master of the unexpected; his profound curiosity and commitment to change are, to me, his most precious lesson and legacy. I cared far more about the ongoing process of the Beatles than about long hair, melodies everyone loved to hum, or the "high art" of *Sgt. Pepper*. I scorned the Beatles fans in my high school who dropped out, after one phase or another, clinging to their ideal version of the group. I welcomed the Beatles' break-up — they had become an oppressive rock 'n' roll royalty. Listening to the *Plastic Ono Band* album the year I entered college, I realized that Lennon was still searching, while Paul McCartney and George Harrison, in particular, seemed busy cashing in their chips from the '60s game.

"I Am the Walrus" came back to me in the early '70s to help me confront LSD and the natural surrealism in my mind without fear. But Lennon had already moved on. He botched his various commitments to political causes — Lennon was no longer part of any group — but the important surprises came from his role as a married man. Lennon and Yoko Ono were easily the most unconventional functioning couple in rock 'n' roll, and the best advertisement for feminism. Lennon demonstrated that stepping off the treadmill of stardom for life with his mate was a more proper extension of "I Want To Hold Your Hand" than using stardom to preach universal love.

— Milo Miles

For me, the shock of consciousness was not the coming of the Beatles but the end of John Lennon. I was born in 1960, and the Beatles were among the first things I was aware of; I heard them before I learned to read. My father took home movies of my brother Harold and me watching the Ed Sullivan show, captivated. My three teenage aunts were big fans early on, and infected Harold and me with their enthusiasm. John was my favorite Beatle, and I told my Aunt Linda that I was going to marry him. She said, "You can't. He's already married." This was a temporary setback, but didn't daunt my affection.

Harold is now a professional musician, but I was in his first group. My mother named us the Lilliputians — I was seven and Harold was five. We would lip-synch to *Meet the Beatles, Beatles VI*, and the soundtrack to *Lord Love a Duck*. The Lilliputians were inspired by Hal's desire for long hair like the Beatles'. His hair was too curly to grow right, so my father produced a wig from somewhere, a shoulder-length brown mop. It never looked exactly like Lennon's, but Harold was ecstatic.

My parents were as caught up in the times as we were formed by them. My mother lopped off her kilts to make miniskirts; my father grew hair down to his collar. He was then a film and drama critic for the now-defunct *Herald Traveler*. When the Beatles came around for their last American tour, he scored a coup by persuading a colleague to take the concert tickets so my father could interview them. We were thrilled when we found out Dadoo was actually going to talk to John, Paul, George, and Ringo, and badgered him to get autographs. He returned *sans* autographs but with a stack of pictures. Two were framed and hung in my parents' bedroom: one of my father talking intently to George, the other of the four of them sitting on a couch, with a copy of *Panorama* magazine and a pack of Larks on the table in front of them. Dadoo said John was the sharpest, on top of the situation, fielding questions about his Jesus remark with ease and wit.

No one who shaped me as much as John Lennon did ever died on me before. He has been with me for as long as I can remember, and the worst part of losing him is the abrupt and immediate knowledge that he won't be my real live godfather anymore.

— Sally Cragin