

## Interview with the Authors

On 16 June 2016, following Aaron's presentation [A Four-Headed Monster: The 4 Beatles in 5 Songs](#) at the Allen County Public Library in Fort Wayne, IN, Aaron and John sat down with Nicole Michael for an interview about their trip and book. Nicole owns and operates 910PR, a public relations service specializing in Beatles-themed promotions. She works as a publicist for several Beatles authors, Aaron included.

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**NICOLE:** When you're sharing close of quarters in a travel trailer with somebody for *that* long -- two and a-half weeks -- you must have learned something about each other. Were there any surprises?

**JOHN:** I didn't realize how much of a workaholic Aaron is. Not in a bad way, but he's obviously committed and persistent and wants to work hard on his programs. Every morning it seemed like the second he was up, the laptop was open and I could hear him typing.

**AARON:** I thought you were sleeping. *[Laughter]*

**JOHN:** Not with all that typing racket! No, just kidding. But I would wake up and there you'd be, working. Even during meals, if we stopped at a restaurant, we'd want that internet connection so that you could post a blog or do whatever you needed to do.

**AARON:** Well, if I'm gonna do something, I do it wholeheartedly.

**JOHN:** It drove home what a hard worker you are. A lot harder worker than than I am.

**AARON:** You said it, not me. *[Laughter]*

**JOHN:** What about you, Aaron -- learn anything about me?

**AARON:** I thought, because you worked for a newspaper, that you'd write concisely, not flowery. But a lot of what you did for this book was more artistic and literary with the metaphors and unusual word choices. Some of those metaphors came out of left field and left me wondering what you were trying to say.

**JOHN:** Being a lefty, I have to say that coming out of left field can be a good thing. *[Laughter]* You're right, though -- not left, in this case -- about the style. While we were on this trip, I was reading a book about creative writing, and the author urged writers to break rules when appropriate, surprise readers, make up words, stringently avoid clichés, stuff like that. I think for every word I used differently that Aaron and my wife Polly liked -- something like "roasty" for Texas in the summer-time -- there must have been five words they groaned about. Like "doodny," which I used to describe Bob Dylan's nasally voice. I thought it was appropriate, but I couldn't sneak it past them. Polly read drafts of our book and when she came across the parts where I'd obviously overdone it, she would add in the margin, "John! That was way creative! *Don't do it again!*" *[Laughter]* Sometimes I made references to things I know about and I think other people know about but maybe *you* don't know about. And that's probably a generational difference.

**AARON:** Certain parts went over my head. Like the term "yippies".

**NICOLE:** Yeah, I had to look that one up. *Did he mean hippies?* No, "yippies" is an actual thing, a common phrase 45 years ago.

**AARON:** I'd never heard it before. I thought of Chihuahuas when you said that. *[Laughter]*

**JOHN:** It was beneficial to have two generations working on this book. The result was not as limited as it might have been with just one of us writing.

**NICOLE:** So it sounds like there was some tension while writing this book?

**JOHN:** I thought there was, to an extent, such as Aaron and I would argue on use of a word, or a simile that the other person believed did not work well. I was, however, pleased with some of the go-arounds we had.

When I was a boy, my family avoided conflict. It was a bad thing -- you didn't contradict, you didn't argue, you didn't challenge. So it was still a little difficult for me to be able to do that with you even though I now realize it's okay to disagree.

**AARON:** We read our writing aloud and the other would make comments. That tennis-style volleying back and forth throughout the editing process helped clarify the text.

**JOHN:** Yeah, we were sculpting the book by this back and forth, making the book take form. Even so, after a longer, particularly difficult or argumentative point, I might feel drained, but I'd also feel elated and invigorated, like, "Yeah, we're getting somewhere with this."

**NICOLE:** Given that, what are the chances that the two of you will work together on future books?

**AARON:** I'm sure Dad will help with future books, at least as editor, if not co-author.

**NICOLE:** Are there any plans for a sequel to this book?

**AARON:** We're already discussing another trailer tour. I'm not sure whether another book is likely to come out of that, but I'm open to the possibility.

**NICOLE:** Maybe if there's demand for a sequel.

**AARON:** Right. If I'm asked about *Days In The Life* frequently, and people say they'd like to read a follow-up, then absolutely I'm open to writing another one.

**NICOLE:** What about other books?

**AARON:** I'm constantly getting ideas for new books and presentations. The one I did tonight, [A Four-Headed Monster: The 4 Beatles in 5 Songs](#), I want to turn into a book at some point. Also, tomorrow in Kendallville, IN, I'm doing a program celebrating Ringo. Many people have expressed an interest in that information in book form.

**NICOLE:** And I understand you want to publish your BEATLESTUDY series?

**AARON:** I'm aiming for December 2016 for the first part of that series, which is an encyclopedia of structure in Beatles music.

**NICOLE:** John, what did you learn about Aaron's writing?

**JOHN:** How far he's come from his first book, *The Beatles & The Avant-Garde* -- much more direct, less esoteric.

**AARON:** Yeah. *Days in the Life* is a conscious counter to that more academic style.

**NICOLE:** From a marketing standpoint, I'm excited to get this book out there.

**AARON:** I could never go on *Good Morning America* promoting *The Beatles & The Avant-Garde*, [Laughter] but this book is more along those lines.

**NICOLE:** How did you two fare as travel partners?

**JOHN:** Traveling with someone was different for me. I like being on my own. I think Aaron is like that, too. But for this trip, having another person there, it made for a more enjoyable time. Aaron and I are a lot alike in that if we have nothing to say, it's okay -- though I didn't mean to quote Beatles lyrics there. [Laughter] We don't need to fill the silence.

**AARON:** That would have driven me absolutely crazy if you had talked about nothing just to fill the time. [Laughter]

**JOHN:** There also was plenty of room in the trailer for the two of us. And when I wanted to go birding, I did so. I didn't feel restricted, as if I had to entertain Aaron; he had to work. I didn't. [Laughter] Joining forces allowed us to do something that we might not have done on our own.

**NICOLE:** So you don't think you would have gone to Arizona on your own?

**JOHN:** I wasn't sure whether I could handle the trip while hauling that trailer. But now that I know what it's like, I definitely want to go back. And if I go by myself, that's fine.

**AARON:** Well, I wouldn't have driven all that way by myself. I was happy to drive the hours that I did, but Dad did most of it. But he likes driving. I drive because I have to, not because I enjoy it.

**JOHN:** Ohhhh, so that's why you wanted me to go on this trip?  
*[Laughter]* So I could do the driving?

**NICOLE:** John was 32 years old when Aaron was born; Aaron will turn 32 next year. Since John is a first-generation fan, it seems like *he* should be the Beatles expert, not Aaron.

**AARON:** At one of my presentations last year, the hosting librarian enthusiastically turned to Dad and said, "We're really excited about your Beatles presentation this evening." *[Laughter]* And one of the comments I frequently receive at my talks is, "I was expecting somebody older." On a related note, restaurant servers will see me analyzing music while waiting for my food and ask if I'm working on homework or studying for finals. One waiter at an Olive Garden in Pennsylvania retracted an offer for a free wine sample because "you're not 21." I know I look young for my age. I'm 30 but I've had people guess as young as 16. My ever-present baseball cap and backpack complement the illusion. But at least I'm no longer riding my bike to work! *[Laughter]*

**JOHN:** On the other hand, I'm consistently given senior discounts without even asking for them! *[Laughter]* Maybe I should stop wearing my granny glasses, you know -- those mask-like, huge black frames that fit over my trifocals?

**NICOLE:** A good part of this trip was spent with Alan and Carrie, John's childhood friends. How did Aaron react to them?

**JOHN:** It seemed he and Alan and Carrie were on the same wavelength. They spoke easily together on various topics, they were open to the other's interests, they enjoyed learning about each other.

**AARON:** They were open and welcoming hosts, which makes it a lot easier to be a friendly guest.

**JOHN:** But Aaron has always handled himself well, even in high school and college when it was impressive to see him comfortably discuss things -- whether musical or not -- with visiting musicians or with his professors.

**NICOLE:** That's interesting because people who are very scholarly sometimes lack social skills.

**AARON:** Mmhmm. "Ivory tower syndrome".

**JOHN:** Your teaching skills developed in Boston, and that's made a difference in your personality. You seem to relate to people better since then.

**AARON:** For sure. For a long time I wanted to be a music professor and teach at a university. But there is often an arrogance to academicians. That's ultimately why I left classical academia and embraced pop music.

**NICOLE:** Will you ever go back to university life? Might you apply for professorships when you stop working as a touring Beatles scholar?

**AARON:** It's possible, but it would have to be at a very progressive institution. I have no interest in joining an old crusty school.

**NICOLE:** John, after hearing so many of Aaron's programs, have you started to hear The Beatles' music differently?

**JOHN:** Definitely. And that's the point of Aaron's presentations -- to help people appreciate what's going on musically in each of these songs. For all the years I've listened to 'Penny Lane', I could tell there was a little bit of difference between the verses and choruses, but I had no idea what it was. After hearing Aaron's discussion of the song, I know it's a change in key.

**NICOLE:** And Aaron, after spending so much time with your Dad, have any of his observations and anecdotes influenced your perceptions?

**AARON:** Sure. In the book Dad talks about Crosby, Still, Nash, and Young and how Young was the more gritty, less refined, more raw and emotional member of the band. I knew of CSNY, and occasionally people ask me to compare and contrast them with The Beatles. But I've had to admit ignorance -- I'm just not familiar enough with CSNY's music to comment. But now when I'm asked I'll have something to say.

**NICOLE:** You both mention interests outside of The Beatles in the book: John with bird watching, Aaron with baseball. How do you feel about each other's "other" interests? Can you draw any similarities between how you observe birds and baseball? You both seem very orderly about your hobbies.

**JOHN:** I put my list of birds on a spreadsheet. And that makes it easier. It tallies the total number. I can go right to the bottom to find out how many species I've seen. There is a practical side to that. I've always considered myself logical and structured. Mr. Spock was my favorite character on *Star Trek*. That tells you something. So yeah, there is a certain amount of linear thinking. Very organized. Everything in its place.

**AARON:** My job is organizing and making sense of pools of information. That's what I do every day. And that's also why I use baseball scorecards. They allow me to keep track of the game and illuminate patterns that I would otherwise miss.

**JOHN:** What kinds of conflicts do you find when part of your personality is so pragmatic, while you must also be creative as a musician and author?

**AARON:** In one of the chapters I talk about the balance between intuition and cultivation -- how learning how to teach was painstakingly slow, whereas the musical analysis just comes to me naturally. One of Lennon's quotes has always resonated with me: "It doesn't make me better or worse than anybody else; I just see and hear differently from other people -- the same way musicians hear music differently from non-musicians. And there is no way of explaining it." And that's very much how I view myself: I hear and think differently from most people. And that's not inherently a good thing or a bad thing, it's just different. I've been unconventional for as long as I can remember. I've never fit the mold. I'm allergic to mold! *[Laughter]* A large part of maturity for me has been

learning to anticipate scenarios in which my alternative thinking style will yield consequences. I actively avoid situations where those consequences will be negative, and consciously embrace situations where those consequences will be positive. I've learned how to balance my natural gifts with learned skills.

**NICOLE:** Your spring tours ended about two weeks ago. In addition to the March tour documented here, you also visited Florida in February, New York in April, and Milwaukee and Louisville in May. How have you held up over that stretch?

**AARON:** It's been quite an experience -- four months of touring. Now that it's over, I have mixed feelings. On one hand, the last four months have been some of the most exhausting of my life, and I could sure use a vacation; on the other hand, the last four months have been some of the most exhilarating of my life, and I want to continue that wave.

**NICOLE:** And your plans for the future?

**AARON:** Short-term, I'm going to Kansas City in September, New England in October, and back to Wisconsin/Illinois in November. I'll start planning for 2017 shortly.

Long term, I suspect this is a viable career for about five years. I've been doing it full-time for one year already, so I figure I have maybe four years left. After that, I'm not sure I'll *want* to sustain this type of profession even if I *could* sustain it. It is, after all, a ridiculous amount of work and keeps me away from home the majority of the time. Having said that, I enjoy it. If I won the lottery tomorrow, I would continue doing what I'm doing. I might not pursue it *quite* as vigorously, [*Laughter*] but this is what I want to do.