

DON HENLEY LENNON'S WAS ONE of the first voices I emulated when I began to sing. When we held tryouts in my pal's dad's living room for the singer in our band, I sang a Beatles song that Lennon sang. There is something about the timbre of his voice, something that it conveys, that still gets to me. The quality and the poetry of his lyrics. The wry sense of humor. And the boyishness, in the beginning. There are a great many things that touch me about him. I sang "In My Life" to my wife at our wedding in 1995.

I was at the home I had then on Mulholland Drive [in Hollywood], and the news came over the television that John Lennon had been murdered. I remember the months after that as being a very dark time. There was an incomprehensible sense of loss. I remember the waves of fear and paranoia it sent through the musical community; a great many people hired security after that. Lennon was somebody who seemed like a member of the family, who was indestructible. That event stayed with me for a long time — when I hear the name Mark David Chapman, I shiver.

Lennon was, to put it in his own words, a "working-class hero." One particular lyric I cherish is "Imagine." If you think about it, it could have been something very controversial. You hardly heard anybody remark on the line "Imagine there's no heaven/It's easy if you try/No hell below us. . . ." He is disputing all the tenets of Christianity. Nobody made a fuss about it, not like the time he said, "We're more popular than Jesus." Probably technically not false, but they really came down on him for that. "Imagine" is about all the war and strife that religion has caused, and saying, "Let's do away with all that." Which I think is a very brave and wonderful thing to say.