

‘John & Paul’ explores complex ties between Lennon and McCartney

By JEFF ROWE
The Associated Press

Ian Leslie’s “John & Paul: A Love Story in Songs,” takes a detailed look — 426 pages — at how John Lennon and Paul McCartney worked together from their meeting as teenagers until John’s death.

Had McCartney not decided at age 15 to go hear Lennon’s band playing in a London suburb, the world would have been denied the multitude of The Beatles’ songs that brightened a generation and brought escalating musical innovation to rock music.

As Leslie affirms in the book, Lennon and McCartney early on developed a personal and creative chemistry that allowed them to elevate each other’s work to the timeless song classics still heard around the world.

And into that relationship dives Leslie, analyzing the mountain of articles and books written about the Beatles and interpreting messages the two men were sending to each other in their solo songs, particularly after the band’s break-up when both were writing and performing as solo acts.

Leslie focuses on exploring the often-tortured relationship between the introverted, sometimes jealous and frequently depressed Lennon and the more outgoing, driven and business-like McCartney.

Leslie’s comprehensive assembly of lyrics, memos and actions of the two men strays into gossip sometimes in his effort to define their relationship. The book labors to find where the Lennon-McCartney relationship fell in the spectrum of best buds to

bromance. Leslie includes a quote from Lennon, when asked if he ever had sex with a man, answers “not yet.” But no other evidence follows that Lennon and McCartney were more than good friends who loved each other as brothers.

Leslie doesn’t pursue what might have blossomed musically had McCartney connected with a Lennon-like collaborator after the Beatle founder’s passing. What songs might McCarthy and Brian Wilson might have written, for example? Leslie so thoroughly dissects the relationship between Lennon and McCartney, though, that it is difficult to imagine another creative equivalent partner for either man.

We don’t hear from McCartney in this book; Leslie says he thought that would have “unbalanced” the story, given the inability to get an assessment from Lennon. That’s a dubious conclusion but what we can take away from this book is this: Lennon and McCartney were living proof that strikingly different personalities can come together for astonishing results. Might there be someone in the world who has not felt a mood lift from a Beatle song? Good luck finding anyone.

So what does McCartney think of the book? We didn’t receive replies from emails to McCartney’s representatives but given the creative intensity of the McCartney-Lennon relationship, something from McCartney seems likely. A new song perhaps, with a soul-connecting reference to his best friend.

‘Finding the Words’ a reflective, deep chronicle worth reading

“*Finding the Words: Working Through Profound Loss with Hope and Purpose*,” by Colin Campbell. New York: TarcherPerigee (an imprint of Penguin Random House), 2023. 304 pages. \$29.00 (hardcover).

“On June 8, 2019, while on a family vacation to Joshua Tree, we made an impulsive offer on a beautiful vacation home in the desert,” Colin Campbell explains near the beginning of “Finding the Words: Working Through Profound Loss with Hope and Purpose,” his heartfelt journey through one of the most devastating events that can occur in anyone’s life.

“Every year since the kids were babies, we would hike in Joshua Tree National Park. And we suddenly decided to throw our usual financial caution to the winds and buy a place of our own. We were all taken by surprise at our boldness. Hart captured it best when he said, ‘Are we really doing this?!’ It felt to all four of us like we were entering a storybook period in our lives. We all started fantasizing about our wonderful future life, vacationing together in our favorite place.”

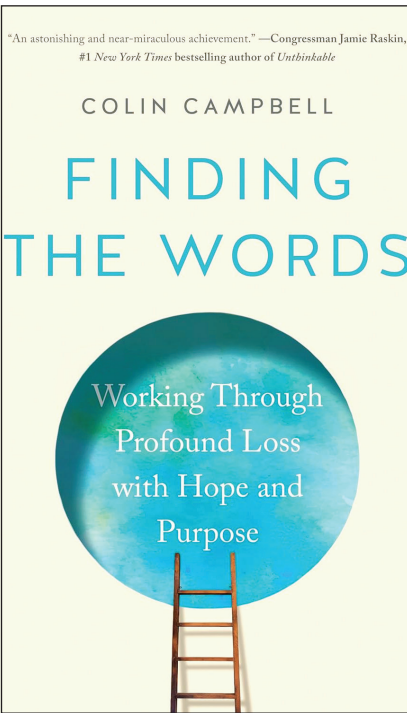
“And then four days later, on June 12, on a trip back to inspect our new vacation home, our storybook life ended,” the author continues. “At 10:45 p.m., our car was hit by a drunk driver going forty miles above the highway speed limit. This driver had a prior DUI. She had failed to appear at court for a subsequent ticket for driving with an open container of alcohol, and her license was suspended. That night, she was driving illegally, and drunk and high — no license, no insurance, and traveling at a recklessly high speed down a dark desert highway. Both Ruby and Hart were in the back seat, with seat belts on.

They were both killed instantly. One moment they were happily chatting away and in the next moment they were taken from us forever. We never saw the car coming.”

If you have ever lost someone you loved unexpectedly, you can instantly relate to the sense of meaninglessness and loss the author felt at that moment — and in all the moments since that tragic event changed his life — and that of his wife — forever. The questions, second-guessing, and the endless ‘what ifs’ that inevitably result when something shatters everything you believed in that gave your life a sense of permanence and coherence. Campbell covers it all in this excruciating yet ultimately comforting chronicle of coming to terms with unimaginable grief while somehow finding the courage to move forward.

When I was younger, I’d occasionally hear adults say things like, “Never wish time away, you never know how much you have,” and “Life is short, never take anything for granted.”

Even at the small rural church where



I grew up, I’d hear that “we are not guaranteed anything.” But those phrases don’t mean anything until something happens that stops you dead in your tracks and makes you see how fragile life really is.

I am not sure I would have even read this book had it not been for the loss of our son last December. Suddenly, however, Campbell’s insightful and introspective prose makes perfect sense. It is obvious he wants to help those experiencing the pain that only comes through unanticipated loss.

Structurally, “Finding the Words” is comprised of ten chapters; the first nine deal with a specific aspect of the grieving process: “Fear,” “Community,” “Ritual,” “Pain,” “Denial,” “Holidays,” “Guilt,” “Rage,” and “Despair.”

He even includes a brief introduction before the initial chapter in which he describes how to get the most out of the book if you are using it to help you cope with loss.

One of the features I found especially helpful was the inclusion of a set of “Actions” and “Journaling Prompts” at the end of each chapter in which Campbell shows how to use the information contained in that section in a productive and significant way.

For instance, at the conclusion of the “Holidays” chapter, the author advises that you “design your own version of the next holiday,” “find continuity in some traditions or rituals from your past,” “allow yourself to cancel a holiday this year,” and “allow yourself a vacation.” Admittedly easier said than done in some cases, but I see the value in these recommendations.

The culminating chapter, “Meaning and Purpose” pulls everything together and provides the reader with a framework for making sense of what has happened and how it has impacted

every aspect of life. What struck me about the narrative was the realism that Campbell brings to his comprehensive dissection of the universal emotional hurricane that anyone experiences when the unthinkable happens.

The man knows his subject matter intimately and sincerely hopes that others can find solace and reassurance from the lessons he and his wife learned as they struggled to find a way to establish and maintain their new reality.

Campbell is a writer and director for theater and film who has taught Theater and/or Filmmaking at Chapman University, Loyola Marymount University, and Cal Poly University, Pomona. He was nominated for an Academy Award for “Seraglio,” a short film he wrote and directed with his wife, Gail Lerner. His one-man performance, “Grief: A One Man ShitShow,” premiered at the Hollywood Fringe Festival where it won a Best of Broadwater Award. “Finding the Words” came to me through Eric Reed, a colleague at Western who also coordinates the local book reviews for the Daily News. He sent it to me after learning of the death of my son; I am glad he did.

Chapter Seven, “Guilt,” was one that particularly resonated with me. I’m sure anyone who has experienced the loss of a close family member or other loved one can relate to the feelings that often accompany those who are left to “carry on.”

“Survivor’s guilt can take many forms and infect almost every aspect of our new lives,” the author explains. “It can make it emotionally difficult to maintain basic levels of care, such as exercise and sleeping. Even the simple act of feeding ourselves can feel like a betrayal of the one who died.

I can feel guilty for enjoying a beautiful sunset, or for taking a walk, or for enjoying a movie. I can feel guilty over doing something that I used to do with Ruby and Hart, and I can also feel guilty over doing something new that Ruby and Hart never got the chance to experience. I can feel guilty simply for surviving the crash when they did not.”

As Campbell notes on his website, “I am not a therapist, psychiatrist, or licensed grief counselor. I don’t have a Ph.D. in behavioral sciences. But I have journeyed with an open heart to some of the scariest, cruellest, darkest places of human suffering, and I have come back with some hard-won truths about grief that I believe are worth sharing.”

After making my way through this reflective and deeply moving chronicle that has so much personal meaning, I could not agree more. Highly recommended.

– Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, University Distinguished Professor, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, WKU.

‘All Boys Aren’t Blue’ tops 2024 list of most ‘challenged’ U.S. library books

By HILLEL ITALIE
AP National Writer

NEW YORK — Removing books from library shelves is no longer just a story of objections from a local community or an individual parent, the American Library Association says.

In its new State of American Libraries Report released Monday, the ALA found more than 70% of attempted bans of a given title or titles come from organized groups and elected officials, and just 16% originated with a parent.

The most commonly criticized books, including Maia Kobabe’s “Gender Queer” and the late Toni Morrison’s “The Bluest Eye,” can be found on such websites as www.ratedbooks.org and through lists compiled by Moms for Liberty and other conservative activists.

“We can trace many of the challenges to lists of books that have been distributed by Moms for Liberty and other groups,” said Deborah Caldwell-Stone, who directs the association’s Office for Intellectual Freedom.

As part of its annual report, the ALA unveiled its list of the 10 most “challenged books” of 2024, starting with George M. Johnson’s “All Boys Aren’t Blue,” and also featuring “Gender Queer,” “The Bluest Eye,” Stephen Chbosky’s “The Perks of



HAVEN DALEY / AP
An LGBTQ+ related book is seen on shelf at Fabulosa Books a store in the Castro District of San Francisco on June 27.

Being a Wallflower” and John Green’s “Looking for Alaska.”

Most of the books listed have LGBTQ+ themes, continuing a yearslong trend. Other objections include references to drug addiction, such as in Ellen Hopkins’ “Crank,” and to slavery and sexual abuse, including those in Patricia McCormick’s “Sold.”

The ALA defines a challenge as a “formal, written complaint filed with a library or school requesting that materials be removed because of content or appropriateness.” The association, which compiles censorship data through media accounts

down to 821 attempts compared to 1,247 the year before, the number remains far higher than before 2021.

And Caldwell-Stone doesn’t believe censorship is declining. Libraries are now more likely to avoid stocking books that are controversial, or may be prohibited by law, she says.

“I spoke to a librarian from Texas who told me she was looking over a political book and wasn’t sure if she could add it to the collection,” Caldwell-Stone said. “Librarians don’t want to get prosecuted or otherwise face legal trouble. A lot of librarians are operating under these kinds of threats.”

The 10 Most Challenged Books of 2024:

1. “All Boys Aren’t Blue,” by George M. Johnson
2. “Gender Queer,” by Maia Kobabe
3. (Tie) “The Bluest Eye,” by Toni Morrison
3. (Tie) “The Perks of Being a Wallflower,” by Stephen Chbosky
5. “Tricks,” by Ellen Hopkins
6. (Tie) “Looking for Alaska,” by John Green
6. (Tie) “Me and Earl and the Dying Girl,” by Jesse Andrews
8. (Tie) “Crank,” by Ellen Hopkins
8. (Tie) “Sold,” by Patricia McCormick
10. “Flamer,” by Mike Curato

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