

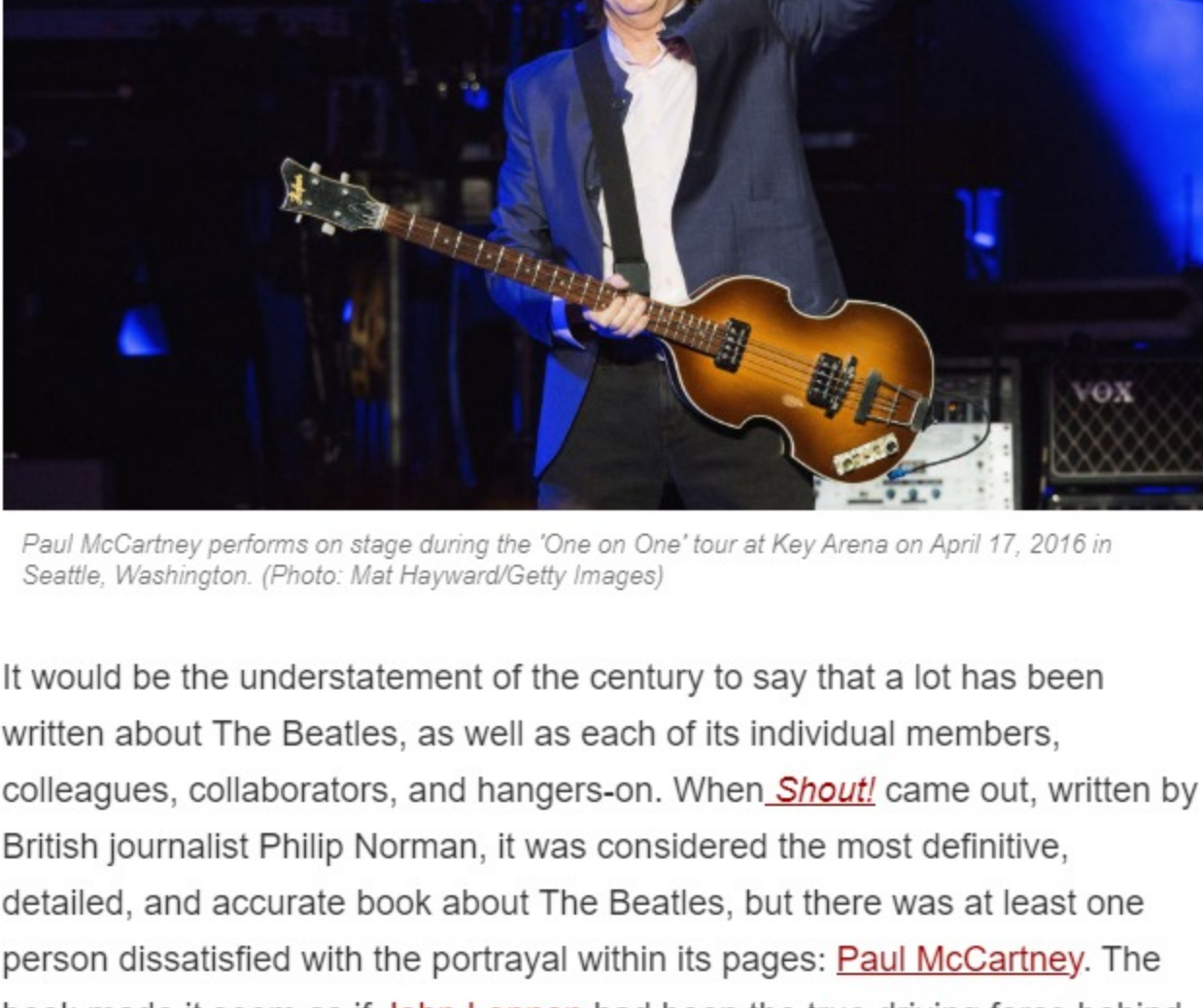
IN THE NEWS

## Paul McCartney: Quite a Life

In his new book, *Paul McCartney: The Life*, Beatles biographer Philip Norman digs deep.

LAURIE ULSTER • MAY 3, 2016

120 SHARES



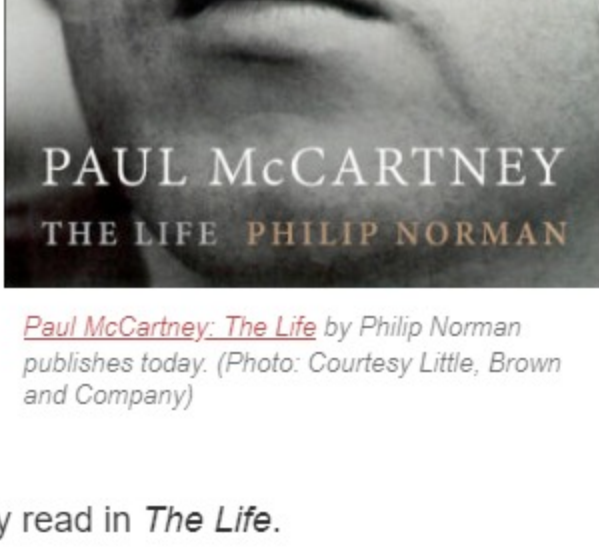
Paul McCartney performs on stage during the 'One on One' tour at Key Arena on April 17, 2016 in Seattle, Washington. (Photo: Mat Hayward/Getty Images)

It would be the understatement of the century to say that a lot has been written about The Beatles, as well as each of its individual members, colleagues, collaborators, and hangers-on. When *Shout!* came out, written by British journalist Philip Norman, it was considered the most definitive, detailed, and accurate book about The Beatles, but there was at least one person dissatisfied with the portrayal within its pages: **Paul McCartney**. The book made it seem as if **John Lennon** had been the true driving force behind The Fab Four: He was the innovator, the creative one, the edgy one, and Paul was a lightweight pop star, inferior songwriter, and consummate PR man.

This wasn't the only time Norman bit the hand that could have fed him; when Wings were just beginning to take flight, Norman was offered the chance to write about them, but turned down the offer. The Beatles were the result of musical alchemy, and would not have been what they were without all four members (plus their brilliant producer, the late Sir George Martin), so Norman felt that writing about Paul's "new band" was not worth his time. Oops. Wings would go on to sell millions of records and McCartney's voice would continue to be relevant in music; just last year he recorded with **Kanye West** and **Rihanna**.

Decades later, when Norman reached out to McCartney and asked for approval to write his biography, he got the green light. No one was more surprised than Norman himself, who set out to do his subject right. While McCartney didn't participate directly, everyone who checked with him before speaking to Norman was told that they had his approval.

In his new book, *Paul McCartney: The Life* (titled similarly to his **John Lennon** bio of 2008), Norman shows McCartney in all his colors: artist, songwriter, genius, family man, and businessman. He's emotionally guarded, alternately confident and insecure, driven, compassionate, and the type of man who's at ease on world tours, rubbing elbows with fellow superstars and politicians, as well as living on a rustic farm, surrounded by kids and animals and leaky pipes. He's controlling, but is that a bad thing when you're Paul McCartney? Sometimes it is, sometimes it isn't. Even those of us with bookshelves full of Beatles books and libraries of bootleg recordings will be surprised by what they read in *The Life*.



Paul McCartney: The Life by Philip Norman publishes today. (Photo: Courtesy Little, Brown and Company)

Here are some Paul facts unearthed in this new book, some of which will be brand new to even the most devoted fans, and some others that were just too good to resist.

### HE WROTE "WHEN I'M SIXTY-FOUR" WHEN HE WAS 16, PLANNING TO SELL IT TO **FRANK SINATRA**

At 16, still living at home with his dad and his brother, McCartney first wrote the song that would become "When I'm Sixty-Four" on a piano purchased from the Epstein family's music store. Yes, The Epstein family, to which **Brian Epstein**, future manager and shaper of The Beatles, belonged.

### SUMMER CAMP ALMOST KEPT HIM FROM BEING IN A BAND WITH JOHN

As all Beatles fans know, John and Paul were in a band together called The Quarrymen. But Paul missed their very first gig, at the now-legendary Cavern Club, because he was already committed to go to Boy Scout camp with his brother Mike.



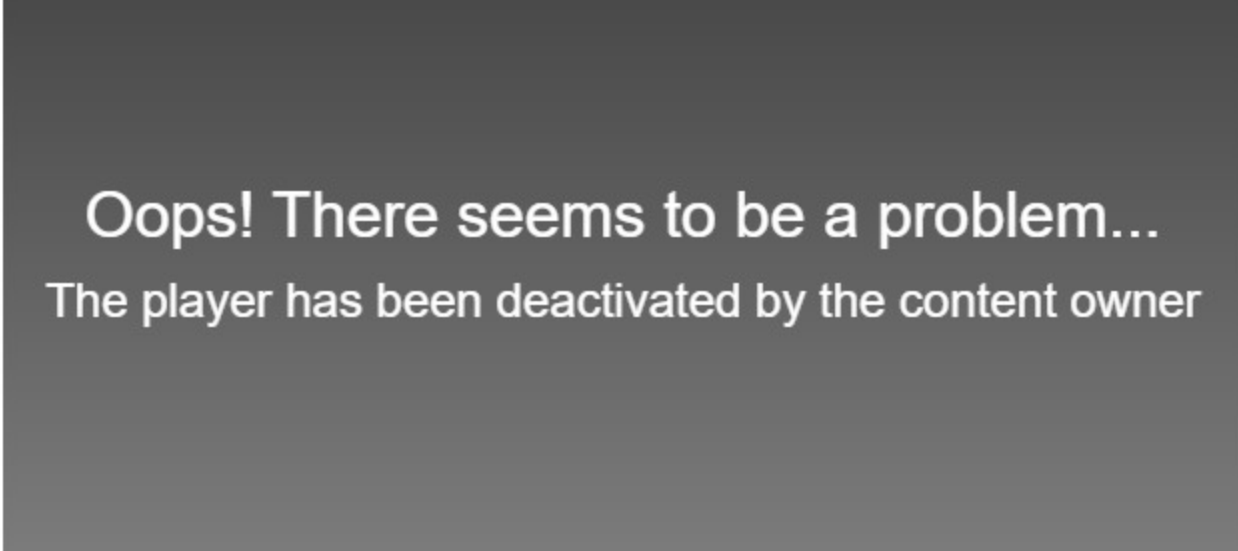
The Quarrymen days: (right to left) Paul McCartney, John Lennon and an absurdly young-looking George Harrison play at a family party. (Photo: AKG Images)

### PAUL'S MOTHER WAS A BIKE-RIDING NURSE LIKE THOSE WOMEN ON CALL THE MIDWIFE

Anyone who watches the BBC's *Call The Midwife* knows the image: cheerful young nurses riding bicycles, birthing kit in the basket, to visit pregnant women in their homes and deliver their babies. Turns out Mary McCartney was one of them. She didn't live with nuns, though; she was busy being wife and mother at home. Tragically, she died of cancer when Paul was 14. But he had a happy childhood with his busy working mum, who would often find gifts from grateful families on the doorstep.

### ALICE COOPER GAVE HIM **GROUCHO MARX'S** BED FOR HIS MEDITATION DOME

What about that sentence isn't captivating? While a quick Google search will tell you that this is already a well-distributed story, it's too good to leave out: for Paul and Linda's anniversary, Alice Cooper gave them a giant round bed that had been given to him by Groucho Marx. Apparently Groucho and Cooper had become friends—who knew?—and Groucho gave Cooper the bed, saying maybe he'd have better luck with it. (Wink wink, nudge nudge.) Cooper says he didn't, particularly, and he gave it to Paul and Linda to put in their meditation dome in their London home.

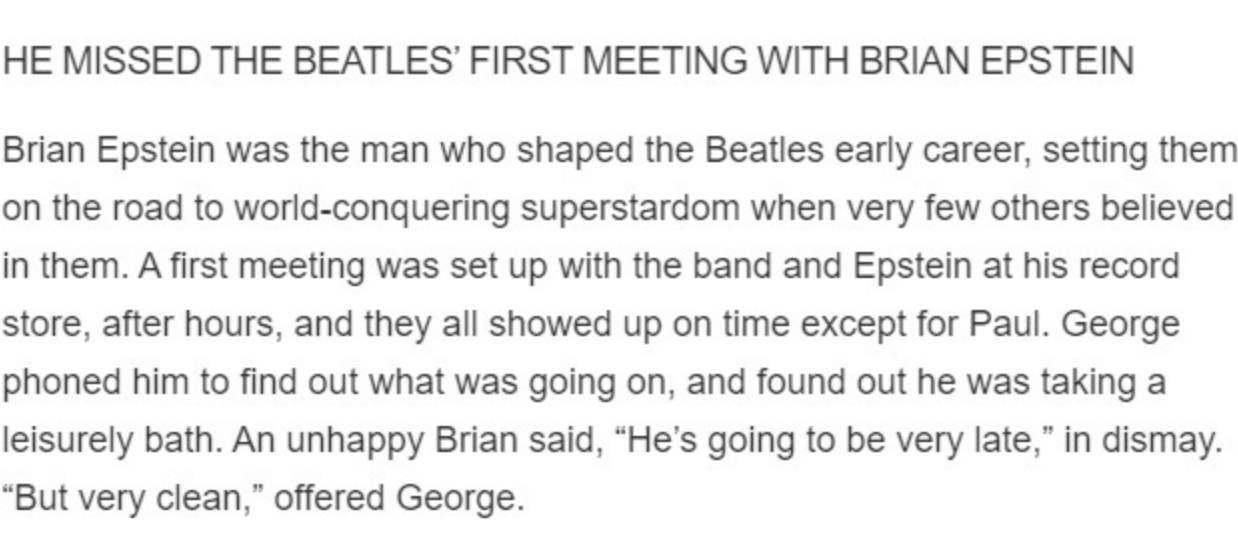


### PAUL GOT ON GREAT WITH HIS GIRLFRIENDS' MOMS

McCartney had a number of girlfriends before he finally settled down with Linda Eastman, and he got along beautifully with each of their moms. He went out with Iris Caldwell for two years and during that time, he used to hang out at her family's house when he wasn't touring. He got so comfortable with her mum that she would actually comb his hairy legs for him.

Actress Jane Asher was a serious girlfriend who almost married McCartney at one point, and her mother Margaret offered up her basement to John and Paul for their songwriting sessions. "I Want to Hold Your Hand" was written there. McCartney ended up living at the Ashers' home for a couple of years, although he wasn't allowed to sleep in Jane's room, or be anywhere nearby once night fell. They gave him a former maid's room to use when he was on tour breaks, squeezing in a single bed, a wardrobe, and a single shelf. He kept his gold records and his MBE medal under the bed. In fact, he was still living there when he got a phone call telling him he'd just become a millionaire for the first time.

Margaret had migraines that gave her insomnia, so she was often up when McCartney came home from gigs or nights out. She would cook him food at whatever hour he came in, and do his laundry for him regularly. And it was Margaret who connected him with a piano teacher, so he could finally learn to play "properly," although The Beatles were already selling millions of records and famous around the world.



### HE MISSED THE BEATLES' FIRST MEETING WITH BRIAN EPSTEIN

Brian Epstein was the man who supercharged the Beatles early career, setting them on the road to world-conquering superstardom when very few others believed in them. A first meeting was set up with the band and Epstein at his record store, after hours, and they all showed up on time except for Paul. George phoned him to find out what was going on, and found out he was taking a leisurely bath. An unhappy Brian said, "He's going to be very late," in dismay. "But very clean," offered George.

### THE BEATLES ONCE TRIED AND FAILED TO ROB A DRUNKEN SAILOR

The stories of the early days of Beatles in Hamburg are legendary. They had sex with (at least) dozens of women, they drank themselves silly, they popped pills constantly, and got themselves into trouble regularly. One night, when they were strapped for cash, they got the idea of robbing a drunken sailor. They found a victim, befriended him, and tried to lure him around the corner to a more secluded area. Paul and George promptly lost the nerve to go through with it, and John (whose idea it was) and Pete Best gave it a go, but the sailor turned out to be less helpless than they thought, and so they fled.

### HE HAD SEX WITH FOUR WOMEN AT ONCE

Oh yeah, there's that, too. Also paternity claims... a lot of paternity claims.

### GEORGE HARRISON LOST HIS VIRGINITY WITH THE OTHER BEATLES IN THE ROOM

This one's in a lot of the books too, but George lost his virginity with John, Paul, and former drummer Pete Best in the room, who cheered when he was done. Classy stuff, for these future Members of the British Empire (except poor Pete).



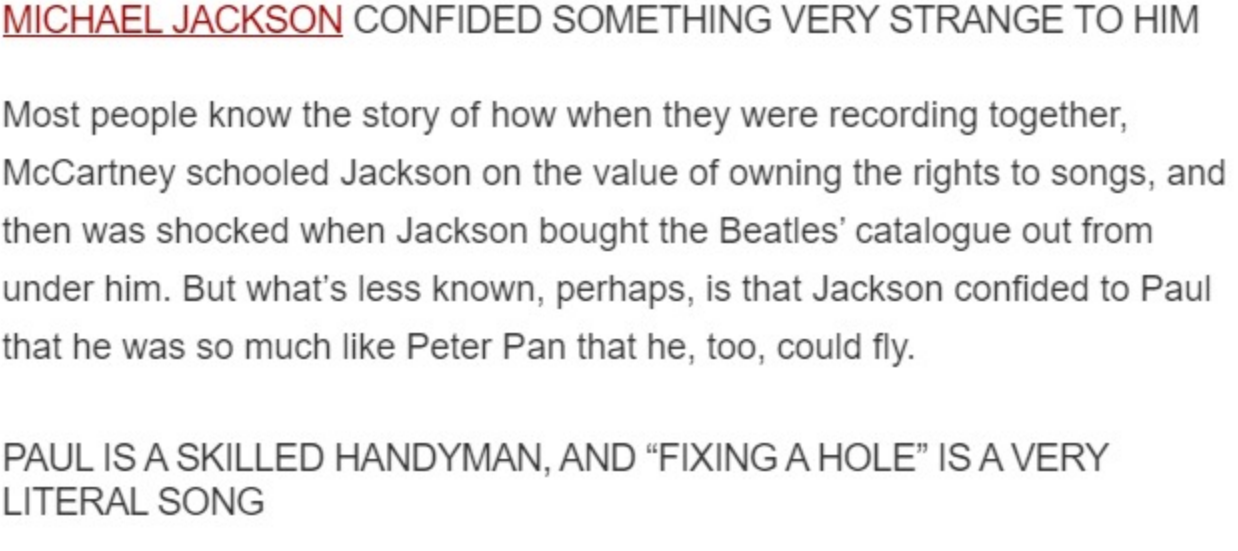
The Beatles wave to fans at Kennedy Airport in New York City on February 7, 1964. (Photo: United Press International, photographer unknown [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons)

### THERE WERE A LOT OF WACKY IDEAS FLOATING AROUND FOR BEATLES MOVIES AFTER HELP!

The Beatles had made two hit movies, *A Hard Day's Night* and *Help!*, and producers came to them with all kinds of ideas for the next one. One pitch suggested casting the lads as D'Artagnan and the Three Musketeers, but having them play it Marx Brothers-style. Another pitch called for them to play four different sides of one man's split personality. Philosopher/pacifist **Bertrand Russell** suggested they adapt the stage musical *Oh! What a Lovely War*, but the music had to be from the World War I era, which ruled out using Lennon-McCartney tunes, so they passed. **Richard Attenborough** eventually made his directorial debut with the film, which starred **Maggie Smith**, **John Gielgud**, and **Laurence Olivier**.

They tried to team up with playwright **Joe Orton**, but they rejected his story, which put the Beatles in drag, and had them all ending up in bed with the same woman.

And they also talked about adapting *Lord of the Rings*, with Lennon as Gollum, McCartney as Frodo, Starr as Sam, and Harrison as Gandalf. Someone from Apple, the Beatles' company, even spoke to **Stanley Kubrick** about it, but it never came together.



The Beatles in their final live performance on the rooftop of Apple headquarters on January 30, 1969. (Photo: AKG Images)

### HE MEMORIZES THE MUSIC HE WRITES

Since his early days writing songs with Lennon, McCartney learned to memorize everything they wrote so they wouldn't forget it. This habit continued throughout his career, and came in incredibly handy when he was in Nigeria recording *Band on the Run*. He and Linda took an ill-advised walk from one villa to the other one night, and were held up at a knife-point. The bag he was carrying full of lyric sheets and cassette demos was stolen, never to be returned, but because of his ability to remember it all, the theft delayed things but didn't derail them.

### LINDA HAD SOME CELEBRITY HELP TESTING RECIPES FOR HER FIRST BEST-SELLING VEGETARIAN COOKBOOK

Among her taste-testers: **Ringo Starr** and **Twiggy**.

### MICHAEL JACKSON CONFIDED SOMETHING VERY STRANGE TO HIM

Most people know the story of how when they were recording together, McCartney schooled Jackson on the value of owning the rights to songs, and then was shocked when Jackson bought the Beatles' catalogue out from under him. But what's less known, perhaps, is that Jackson confided to Paul that he was so much like Peter Pan that he, too, could fly.

### PAUL IS A SKILLED HANDYMAN, AND "FIXING A HOLE" IS A VERY LITERAL SONG

When McCartney bought a farm in Scotland, as a place to get away from it all, the house itself was dilapidated, so he took it upon himself to fix it up. He built a couch of old wooden potato-boxes, and would fix the leaky roof himself, which later found its way into a song on *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. Later on, once he and Linda were living there with their children, he laid in a new concrete floor and was frequently found high up on a ladder, fixing holes in the roof. (He also became a pretty good sheep-shearer, inspiring Linda's photo for the cover of his second post-Beatles album, *Ram*.)

He built a flight of stone steps in his father's garden, where the two would sit and have long talks about the troubles at Apple over cigarettes.

And when he was recording Wings' best-selling *Band on the Run* album in Nigeria, and carpenters were building soundproof booths in the studio, he picked up a hammer and joined in.

...

This is all just the tip of the McCartney iceberg. The book covers McCartney's often-ignored talent as an artist (who actually learned painting from time well spent with **Willem de Kooning**), his strange spontaneous jam session with John Lennon and **Stevie Wonder**, and the fact that one of the first people to hear *Rubber Soul* was **Naked Lunch** author **William S. Burroughs**. There's a story about the recording he made with **Yoko Ono**, the McCartney kids, and **Sean** and **Julian Lennon**, as well as a description of him, early in his career, trading musical shrieks with **Little Richard**, until he got it right. Paul McCartney has had a life well-lived, still rich with inspiration and drive, and well worth reading up on.

TAGS - IN THE NEWS - MUSIC - HISTORY & CULTURE

BY LAURIE ULSTER