



# The Greedy Bastard Diary: A Comic Tour of America

*Eric Idle*

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## **The Greedy Bastard Diary: A Comic Tour of America** Eric Idle

The man who brought you the anthems "Always Look on the Bright Side of Life" and "Sit on My Face and Tell Me That You Love Me" shows his naughty bits -- and so much more

A stunningly witty exploration of the American landscape -- not to mention a brilliant comic's mind -- this diary is chock-full of everything you ever wanted to know about Eric Idle, Monty Python, America, and sleeping on a bus. In these pages the sixth-nicest Python is cheeky, touching and funny when recounting the riotous tales of his beginnings, his school days in a Dickensian academy for boys, and his affectionate reminiscences of fellow Pythons, traveling the world, as well as his longtime friend, George Harrison.

Astonishing, moving, at times even amusing, this chronicle of Idle's road trip during his Greedy Bastard Tour will improve your sex life dramatically. After only a few pages you will begin to feel intelligent, charming, and clever, then aroused, then funny. And after a few chapters whatever personal or health problems you are experiencing will immediately vanish. So come experience 80 days, 15,750 miles, and 49 cities as you never have before!

## **The Greedy Bastard Diary: A Comic Tour of America Details**

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## **Ensiform says**

Idle went out, not exactly as a one-man show, but to do some stand-up for the first time, leavened with old Python skits and songs. It's a fairly amusing book; Idle tosses out hoary old one-liners and amusing anecdotes with equal alacrity (and some land more squarely than others). I found it okay reading, but ultimately unsatisfying. Idle puts in personal reminiscences, purple prose descriptions of the scenery of each new place, a few observations on the pressures of putting on a show, and a bit about his own life (school, friendship with George Harrison, etc, his family).

Unfortunately, in being all these things, the book is none of them. I would have loved to read Idle's comical take on what the real ins and outs, in detail, of what it's like to live out of a bus and put on a new show every night. I also might have enjoyed Idle's full autobiography told as a series of anecdotes. But this book is neither of those things; it's half of them plus a little bit of filler ("I'm trying to earn enough to get my daughter through college and my wife through collagen" --- hoo boy). Idle is a likeable narrator, but this book smacks of scant effort.

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## **Timothy Rodgers says**

Not just a diary of his comedy show tour across the USA but also filled with anecdotes and reflections on the past. There were many points where I would laugh out loud, snicker, and I shed more tears than I expected from a Python book. The circle of friends and acquaintances are many names we all recognize (actors, presidents, singers, etc) but he does not name drop, he is remembering and reflecting on past events. I never knew how close he and George Harrison were, that the Monty Python Show was first introduced to the USA in the grand state of .... well.. that would be spoiling the surprise. :)

Because of the diary style this makes a very good read either at one sitting or putting the book down now and then even for a month or so. There is no plot to track or characters to get confused.

I also just finished John Cleese's biography called 'So, Anyway...' and put Eric's book head and shoulders above John's as entertaining and enjoyable to read.

Please read this book.

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## **Slaa!!! says**

Now that I'm in the reviewing mood, I'd like to go back and say a few words~\* about this book. I expected it to be a daily account of life on the road with his show, and was surprised to find that he went off on so many tangents and ended up writing about various memories, events, etc that popped into his head. But I loved it. I was especially surprised to discover how honest, heartfelt, and sad a lot of it was... especially when he was talking about his childhood, his family, and his relationship with George Harrison. I got emotional many a time. It made me love and care for Eric that much more... although, on the other hand, it did feel like at times he was maybe trying too hard to be funny - for instance, the random jokes on the sides of the pages were completely unnecessary and all of that sort of thing just reminded me that Michael Palin is my favorite Python for very valid reasons. But I do love Eric and I think any fan would enjoy this book.

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## Art says

Read this book in a good mood wearing a smile.

“It’s an evening of eye-opening hilarity with a master comic at the top of his game,” wrote The San Francisco Chronicle about this show in one of Eric Idle’s best reviews.

From his funny world, Eric Idle wrote this daily dairy about the joys and challenges of producing and acting in a comedy road show traveling to forty-nine cities in eighty days across Canada and the United States fifteen years ago.

This funny and self-deprecating book takes us on tour, where Eric Idle enjoys each city and its audience. Along the way, he shares his struggles with the show at the beginning of the tour. What seems like a seamless evening of comedy belies the work involved.

Act One, uneven at first, strengthened after harsh notes from his stage manager. Idle took drastic action, including a reordering of the pieces. I found it refreshing to read that the outwardly funny star of the show maintains enough professional distance from his work so that he will change or drop bits in order to satisfy the audience.

Early in the tour, Idle realized that the audience wanted more bits from Monty Python. Idle needed to balance the needs of the Python audience with finding his own voice. So he and one of the actors rehearsed “The Argument Clinic,” which is “fun to play,” he said, because of the precise writing. This classic sketch satirizes logic, language and philosophy. Adding Python bits to the show made a difference by the time this tour played Toronto.

Among the stops, this road trip travels to places that jog my own memories. Idle and the crew stayed at a hotel in St Louis that uses the refurbished Union Station for its lobby. It is beautiful. I stayed there for a couple of nights. In the Quad Cities, a cabbie showed him the sights, including an old-time ice cream parlor where I often took my parents during their final years, in Davenport. For the thirty-fifth show, the group arrives at The Vic Theater in Wrigleyville. The show, after all the fine tuning, now seems natural and comfortable. “I love Chicago,” he said. His in-laws live in the suburbs. On the way to Madison, the buses pass the gigantic Hormel factory that makes Spam, which led to excited shrieks because of the Python sketch of 1970 called “Spam.”

In Las Vegas, where the show played The House of Blues, Idle spots Trump at breakfast with two “healthy-looking” young women. That was fifteen years ago.

Time and again throughout this diary, Idles thanks his crew, appreciating the teamwork to make this musical review happen. The two buses drive into town overnight and set up a show in six hours. After a two-hour show, he likes meeting and signing merch for the audience. Ninety minutes after the curtain falls, off they go to the next city.

On the road, in their million-dollar tour bus, Idle enjoyed listening to music, such as Beethoven’s “Pastoral Symphony” and “Love and Theft” by Bob Dylan.

After the final show in Los Angeles, everyone hugs, bids farewell and waves tearful goodbyes.

This diary wrote itself, Idle writes. During the eighty-day journey, he treasured his diary time the most. Like letter writing and email, keeping a diary became a form of improv. He goes to sleep early with Chopin and a good book, getting up early to write.

In his acknowledgments, Idle remembers his friends and the world who made his life a joy to live. “Thank you for all the food and laughs.”

I discovered this thirteen-year-old book while learning about Idle’s new autobiography, *Always Look on the Bright Side of Life: A Sortabiography*.

I saw an earlier iteration of this road show three years before this documented tour when it played at The Riverside Theater, a fine old vaudeville theater, perfect for this music hall program. Eric Idle revives vaudeville. And that’s what I found so appealing when it played here. A peek into quick-change sketches as they played a hundred years ago. Fun. The ingredients for a laugh riot: Eric Idle and his cast in front of two thousand Python fans. A memorable couple of silly hours, happily releasing our endorphins all over the place.

Peter Crabbe, at six-foot-seven, serves as the show’s foil to Eric Idle, who stands six-foot-one. Crabbe takes to the audience as a vague uniformed member of Homeland Security, a role he rewrote every night for every city as he panders shamelessly to local audiences. Crabbe’s rant brings audience to such a high pitch that it is hard to follow, serving as a closer for the first act. In Milwaukee, Crabbe went on and on in his pompous and officious character, at one point wondering went wrong here. Why, for example, do we name it Lake Michigan when we should call it Lake Wisconsin. Well, the audience cheered and howled at that one, one among many local jokes.

Idle moves the audience while the audience moves him. Then, at the end, everyone sings, “Always Look on the Bright Side of Life,” his most famous song. At the Riverside, this was one of those great community sing-along moments where we’re all in this together, bringing down the house after two hours of fun.

In addition to comments about life on stage, Idle takes us back stage and into his creative muse along with the many moving parts that make a traveling show like this happen.

In every city, Idle faces the incessant challenge of interviews, which he turns into a form of wordplay. As a Python, he was the only one who wrote alone. He writes early in the morning because he cannot bear talking to anyone before noon.

This road show traveled by bus. The troupe spent many nights in hotels. Eric Idle would ask the front desk to book him under a fictitious name to protect his privacy. But “there is nothing more humiliating,” he writes, than professing a claim to fame to hotel clerks who do not recognize him or never heard of Monty Python.

Meanwhile, the tour stimulated his writing. Introspection came from the sheer amount of time, the many places and the unwinding road. Why does he do this?, he reflects. Because he knows how to make people laugh. It’s what he does. He draws inspiration from meeting the audience. “We cheered people up,” he writes. Eric Idle became a laugh junkie at boarding school to avoid the bullying.

In time, the tour comes to an end. Idle’s wife worries about his return home. How can he adapt after all those standing ovations? Idle tells his wife that she can give him standing ovations at home.

I like books written by journalists and comedy writers. They know how to tell pithy stories.

In a postscript, Idle tells about “Spamalot,” which he began drafting seventeen years ago. He began at dawn with pencil and paper, finishing his first draft in four weeks. Then he started writing the songs. Along the way, Idle learned one thing about writing: It’s all about the rewrite.

“Spamalot” played here years ago at the Performing Arts Center as part of the Broadway Across America tour. The show returns in March to the biggest theater in town with a huge stage. I laughed then and will roll in the aisles again when it comes to town in the spring.

If you are new to Monty Python, introduce yourself by enjoying the troupe at The Hollywood Bowl, which includes many of their best television sketches in front of a live audience. Great fun, for the most part, but I’m not a fan of camp. For something with a narrative, try “Life of Brian,” a religious satire, funded by George Harrison. Or, to get ready for “Spamalot,” try “Monty Python and The Holy Grail,” although the stage show departs broadly from the film. Monty Python Live (Mostly), of four years ago, captures the troupe and sketches for the last time. A one-night event on the main screen of The Oriental Theater played that show bringing many of us silly people together again. Many good bits, but the members aged into their seventies and camp does not wear well. Nonetheless, the goodnights and goodbyes end with a rousing chorus of “Always Look on the Bright Side of Life.” And we all sing along.

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## **Barry says**

Back when Eric Idle came through Minneapolis on his last tour, a friend of mine worked as an usher at Pantages Theater. As a massive Python fan since childhood, he was excited as could be. So when I saw this book, a memoir written while on the road on that same tour, for \$2 at a library sale I had to gobble it up.

It’s a fast, surprisingly touching read. Idle does his share of name dropping, but I still got the sense that he was a decent, down-to-earth sort of guy. He shared some spectacular details about his marriage and his deep friendship with George Harrison. Yes, that George Harrison.

Still, you gotta be a pretty big Python fan to enjoy this. I did. And then I passed it on to my friend.

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## **Amy Gravino says**

This book. Wow. I am clearly starved for something, be it Python of the comedic or trouser snake variety. I read the whole thing in about three hours after getting it. Before obtaining it, I did read several reviews on here, many of which referred to Eric Idle as a leech, and that immediately became a selling point for me. I think I just have weird ideas about older men, especially if they’re British and funny. I may need to see a professional about that. Anyway, this was a very easy and quick read (though I keep mistakenly thinking the title is *The Dirty Bastard Diary*, which really wouldn’t be inaccurate). I try not to have regrets in life, but missing Eric’s “Greedy Bastard Tour” circa 2003 (which is the subject of this tome) is roundly one of them. The snippets of life on the road are interspersed with anecdotes from Eric’s past—beautiful stories involving George Harrison and his wife Olivia, reflections on a difficult childhood spent in an orphanage, and touching tales featuring the other Pythons are the standouts by far. I dog-eared the pages I knew I would want to go back to, so moving and poignant and hilarious they were (in sharp contrast to slice-of-life-on-the-road

silliness involving staring at a Victoria's Secret ad and girls putting their panties in the "encore bucket"). But any book needs a sense of balance, I suppose, and on several occasions, Eric's acerbic wit and ribaldry served to throw me off mine. (Mostly in a good way. At a few points, I actually blushed while reading this, and I am not an easy blusher these days.)

The only reason I hesitate to give this book five stars is because there is a bit of misogyny tainting its otherwise superb storytelling. Yet, much like the characters Eric played on "Monty Python's Flying Circus," no matter how off-putting he was, just pages later that Idle charm returned, he made me giggle, and I forgave him.

Overall, a wonderful read. I saw some people accuse Eric of "name-dropping," or talking too much about all his famous friends, but I never felt a sense of any braggadocio on his part. He has been fortunate to encounter and befriend so many people who exist in those misty cloud-filled upper echelons of society, and we are allowed a look in and feel not disdain, but an appreciation for those friendships. So I enjoyed that quite a bit.

This was my first Python-related book (of any stripe), and I look forward to reading more. I wonder if Michael Palin had any panties thrown at him in the Himalayas...

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## **Bruce says**

Eric Idle! The musical Python not named Neil Innes! Wink, wink, nudge, say no more!

Well, a bit more, anyway. This diary follows Idle's idle musings as he travels westward across the US and Canada by Greedy Bastard bus (and high society hostelry). Professional travelogian and fellow Python Michael Palin would be proud of Idle's lush depictions of changing seasons and scenery, if not his lustful misogyny. Still, the author is a pleasant enough companion for all that, and these chronicles are as good a way of passing time in the bathroom as any.

A "Greedy Bastard" tour is rock slang for a traveling show with minimal entourage, tech, and set, though I'm not sure Idle's hit-and-run production of ten wholly qualifies (and he implies that he may have just broken even). That's fine for the author, however, who claims to be doing the six month vaudeville stint primarily for the thrill of the last hurrah. In addition to his (frequently name-dropping) memories and meditations on death, there's more than a hint of poignancy here:

I don't want to be an old drama queen and start with the "Farewell Tour" and "That last chance to see" bullshit, but on the prednisone night, the night I felt off, I glanced in the mirror and had a sudden vision of myself as Archie Rice, a character in John Osborne's play *The Entertainer*. Archie Rice is a sad, old music hall entertainer, condemned to a declining life on the vaudeville circuit, endlessly repeating his old jokes.... At the moment the show is still new for me, elevating and uplifting, thanks to the audience. But there is that specter in the mirror, an old man wearing too much makeup. (pp. 86-7)

This book will be worth your while if you're a Python fanatic like me, and you may even enjoy it if you have at least a passing interest in the backstage insights of a veteran thespian (there's a nice epilogue in which Idle synthesizes the process of bringing *Spamalot* from page to stage). Idle's optimistic worldview (always look on the bright side) is infectious, and you'll be right chuffed for him when he writes (at p. 265),

I feel now that I am finally a comedian.... There is a world of difference between being a comedian and a comic actor. You use many of the same skills: timing, multiple voices, looks, takes, and so on, but being alone onstage is the key.... Of course I am lucky. I don't come on alone. I have the ghosts of the Pythons with me, and the audience is already alive and warm and welcoming and buzzing with expectation... but I still have to make them laugh. And that is something I have learned how to do on this tour.

If you've got a pot to piss in and space along the back of it not yet filled with old magazines, you could do worse than to go along for the ride.

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### **Travis says**

Weird jumble of a book. Feels like the kind of "diary" you write when you know you already have a book deal.

Some really interesting stories and observations on America, comedy, fame and other stuff that almost gets lost in Eric's need to constantly be on and entertaining.

A lot of the jokes are chuckle worthy, but you wish he'd limit himself to seven a page and use the leftover space for say, the actual trip he's on.

That and, while I can understand, as I too am a happily married man who appreciates the female form, but after awhile you just wish he'd get laid so he could talk about something else for a page.

Not a bad book, just uneven and occasionally frustrating.

Works better if read in small chunks rather than in longer sittings.

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### **Wayland Smith says**

I'm not a big memoir kind of guy, but, as with many of my geek kindred, I'm a big Monty Python. So, when I saw this, I figured I'd check it out. It is set up to be a diary of Eric Idle's comedic tour of North America. While it is that, it's a lot more.

There are some insights and memories of the Python days, of course. But that's not what it's about. There are a lot of observations about being on the road, the different theaters, and various cities.

While Idle isn't shy about knocking people he doesn't like, he gushes about people he does. He was apparently very close with the late George Harrison, and tells a lot of great stories about him.

There are bits of Idle's history, and wow did he go through some tragedy when he was younger. I found this a very entertaining, insightful book, and by the end of it, I sort of felt like I'd spent an evening sitting with a very entertaining friend, listening to them tell stories.

It was charming, enjoyable, sad at parts, and gripping. Recommended to Python fans, anyone who's ever been on the road, or anyone who likes a good story about what it's like to be a star.

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## **Ernest Hogan says**

Python nostalgia. A Python-eyed view of turn-of-the-Millennium America. Some show biz and celebrity gossip. When in doubt, old Python lyrics and material. And it's funny. It's also funny how 2004 already seems like ancient history.

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## **Merenwen says**

I don't know why I waited so long to read this - I've had this on my bookshelf for a while, having picked it up from the Bargain Books at Chapters years ago. I tried reading it before, but somehow got side-tracked by another book... but I'm glad I waited until I was older. I got more of the jokes.

This book is great because it's not strictly a travel diary: it's part memoir. Idle was doing a lot of remembering about people as he went on his tour, and the parts about his mother, Graham Chapman, and George Harrison were very touching. I also loved the bits about his wife and children; they remind us that comedians make certain sacrifices when they go on a long tour.

And then there's the quips in the margins, which I think were actual lines from his performances during the tour. Hilarious.

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## **Jess says**

If you go in expecting a comedy book, you'll be disappointed. There is too much heart felt reminiscence on how weird his career and life has turned out to be. On the plus side it sort of shakes the Eric Idle persona Python fans have come to know.

If you come in expect an aging comedians memoirs of what is possibly their last comedy tour you will be just as disappointed. There is just a bit too much actual comedy in the book for that.

If you want to know what it is really like on a comedy tour, well, it doesn't work either. You really only get the star's point of view. The headliner always has things easier and might not always see things the way they are.

And if you expect to get a real travelogue, again, 90% of the time he's either in a hotel or a theater. He doesn't really get to see much of the towns he is in save on his days off. That being said, I was living in and around the Baltimore area around the time he was there. (I remember the day he was there but as a poor college student I couldn't go.) His description of the city of the time is 100%. Well, aside from the part about the city smelling of urine. Even a former part time Baltimore resident knows the smell of the city ISN'T urine. Don't be completely ridiculous, Mr. Idle. The official smell of the City of Baltimore is Urine mixed with Natty Boh's and Old Bay. It's the details that can make or break a story and these things are just as easy to get right as they are to get wrong.

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## Lukasz Pruski says

"You haven't really lived until you have stood onstage at Carnegie Hall in full drag singing 'Sit on My Face'"

The longest book I have read in quite some time (325 pages!) has left me with a feeling of disappointment. Eric Idle's *The Greedy Bastard Diary* (2005), a journal from the author's comedy tour of the U.S. and Canada in late 2003, contains entries that were originally published daily on the *PythOnline* website in the form of what we would call today a blog. The writings about the preparations and performances at the almost 50 gigs that composed the tour are punctuated with reminiscences of events from the author's extremely successful career in comedy. Although the tone of the diary is very light and the book sparkles with high-quality humor several passages are quite serious and moving.

Eric Idle does not need an introduction as a Monty Python member ("the sixth nicest Python," he calls himself), the comedy team responsible for by far the funniest show in the history of world television and in my opinion the funniest ever event in entertainment, one that has never yet been matched in its combination of wit and hilarity. Mr. Idle is the author of many famous sketches - *Nudge, Nudge* is probably the best known - and the composer of many Python songs of which *Always Look on the Bright Side of Life* may be the most universally acclaimed. During the U.S./Canada tour that is portrayed in the book Mr. Idle, accompanied by a small team of comedians and musicians, performed both the original Monty Python materials as well as his own post-Python work.

*Greedy Bastard* is a truly hilarious read: I smirked, giggled or laughed out constantly, and there are funny bits on almost every page. The humor is mostly based on language, apparently Mr. Idle's specialty - remember "The man who speaks in anagrams" sketch? - and spans the whole spectrum: we have silly puns like "You can't make a Hamlet without breaking Eggs" or "The Old Yolks Home", we also have obvious but hilarious gag lines like

"The Aladdin Theater is famous for having screened the longest-running film in history: *Deep Throat* [...] It ran here for more than twenty years. Frankly I think the movie sucks."

as well as more subtle punchlines:

"[...] for me a show isn't a show without leggy girls in spangly tights putting their legs over their heads, and that's just backstage."

So why am I complaining? What is wrong with the book is the utterly irritating name-dropping: Mr. Idle meticulously lists the celebrities that he met, knew, or was friends with. I do not have time to count all famous people mentioned in *Greedy Bastard* but here are just some names from about 30 pages of the book: George Harrison, Robin Williams, Uma Thurman, Paul Simon, Lauren Hutton, Henry Kissinger, Ronald Reagan, Bill and Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump, Bill Maher. There probably are five times as many in the whole book. I find it inexcusable that Mr. Idle had not spent any time with Jesus Christ: an unfortunate omission. Most likely the reason of prodigious name-dropping is that the book is aimed at the American audience - that's where the money is - and Mr. Idle caters to the Religion of Celebrity, the faith whose adherents outnumber followers of any other religion in the United States.

Again, this is an extremely funny book with a few serious, contemplative fragments - the author writes touchingly about his mother's and George Harrison's deaths - so it is a great pity that the name-dropping and the obsession with celebrity make the book so much less readable.

Two and three-quarter stars.

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## Tristy says

If you can look past the ridiculous sexism that runs through this tale like a warped thread, this is a fun, silly, entertaining read. Eric Idle has some real sweetness to him and of course, he's brilliantly funny. I admire his dedication to writing every morning and his diary pages reflect those wonderful early morning moments, when our minds wander to the past, the scenery and life changing moments. I was especially entranced and moved by his tales of being George Harrison's (of the Beatles) good friend. His tales of hanging out with George are worth picking up this book all on its own. Lots of great laughs.

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## sj says

Originally posted here as part of the 30 Day Book Challenge

This category is kind of silly, because it makes the assumption that people don't generally read or enjoy non-fiction. What I DON'T usually read are biographies (not for any particular reason, I am just not a huge fan). Most of the non-fiction books I read are collections of essays, but when it came down to it, I knew exactly which book I was going to choose for this category (although it was close, and this was the runner-up).

### A Non-Fiction Book I ~~Actually~~ Enjoyed

It's no surprise that I'm a Python (Monty) fan to any of you, if you've read the blog for any period of time at all, you'll know that.

I wasn't even sure what I was expecting from this book when I started reading it, all I really knew was that my husband had purchased it for me and brought it home because he thought I would enjoy it.

It's exactly what the title claims it is, Eric Idle's diary from the 2003 Greedy Bastard tour. It's not about the other Python members, it's his daily diary entries during the fall of that year.

Mixed in with the expected silliness are some truly touching stories as he reminisces during his daily letters to himself (and us). I had to put the book down and walk away for a bit as he remembered his friendship with the late George Harrison on the anniversary of his death.

Few people can manage to discuss friendship with such clarity, to be able to impart what that friendship meant to them to their readers, and I had no idea something like this could come from one of my favourite funny men.

Parts of it made me uncomfortable (he's kind of a lech, really), but for the most part it was a highly satisfactory read.

Even if you don't read the whole thing, take a look at what he has to say about my favourite Beatle and try to walk away without a lump in your throat.

I dare you.

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