

Did Anyone Ever Tell You, You Look Like...

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In 2005 I met actor Ricky Aiello, son of actor Danny Aiello, at my friend's annual Christmas Eve party. Ricky and I immediately hit it off. The fact that he grew up with an Italian father and a Jewish mother, whereas I grew up with a Jewish father and an Italian mother, gave us plenty to talk about. Early on in our conversation he asked, "Did anyone ever tell you that you look like John Lennon?" Well yes, actually. But it's been a while. In my 20s and 30s I was told countless times that I resembled Lennon by friends and strangers alike and in the mid-1980s was even mistaken for his son Julian. Now in my early 50s the comments aren't as frequent, although my kids and their friends still sometimes call me "Glennon," which I find endearing. That's why I was surprised when Ricky made that observation because I just don't see the resemblance these days.

Like many Beatlemaniacs, Lennon was my guy. I watched the Beatles debut on *The Ed Sullivan Show* along with 74 million other people, and the next day I was in a band playing air guitar. I remember in 1971 when I was 14 years old and begged my mother to take me to see Dr. Bellet to get my eyes checked. Little did she know that I was praying to be near-sighted so I could get a pair of glasses like Lennon's "working class" specs. Well, be careful what you wish for because my wish eventually came true 10 years later when I no longer wanted to be seen wearing glasses. Anyway, I'm both flattered and embarrassed by the comparison. Flattered because it's an honor to resemble one of my musical idols, a person I still respect to this day, and embarrassed because I'm self-conscious that people may think I'm trying to look like Lennon, which, believe me, I'm not.

So, a few days after the Christmas party I received a very excited call from Ricky who asked me to forward my headshot and bio to his agent ASAP. He explained that a movie, "Chapter 27," was now in production on the life of Mark David Chapman, the man who shot and killed John Lennon, and the producers still hadn't cast the role of the Beatle. It starred Jared Leto as Chapman and Lindsay Lohan as his girlfriend. Not too shabby. I had been acting in many community theatre productions over the years, and although it was a very small part I felt confident that I could handle it. I mean, come on, if there was ever a part for me, this was it! Then I started thinking: What if all I'm asked to do is to get shot and die? Oh my. I definitely had some reservations about that. You see, the night Lennon was killed still resonates deeply within me on many levels. On Monday, December 8th, 1980, I came home at around 11 pm and found my mom and her sister sitting quietly in our den. My mom said that my dad had a massive heart attack and was in serious condition at the hospital. Oh, and John Lennon was shot and killed. I remember feeling like the air had been sucked out of me. Two important men in my life. One dead and the other hanging on to dear life—all in one night. I felt numb. I walked slowly to my room and went to sleep.

Anyway, I decided to go for the part. My wife—who, by the way, looks nothing like Yoko Ono—took a photo of me with my most Lennon-like look, and I immediately sent

it along with my bio to Ricky's agent and waited. A few days later I received the call. The casting director and film director wanted to see me. I couldn't believe this! I'm auditioning for a movie! Forget the fact that I wrestled with the ethical and moral issues of participating in a film that focused on the life of a twisted, sick, fanatic who robbed us all of a Beatle, which is exactly the type of fame he wanted. Or the fact that my only scene would probably be getting gunned down, which troubled me on so many levels. I'd probably be typecast for the rest of my life, relegated to playing John Lennon in made-for-television Lifetime movies. Forget all that. Make-up!

The agent called with the audition time and location and asked that I stop by his office first so we could meet. Oh, and he said to also dress the part. So I grabbed my old wire-rimmed glasses, put on some blue jeans and a work shirt and, with my hair parted in the middle, headed out the door. When I showed up at his door, he gasped. "Holy crap! You're even built like him!" Up until now I never really thought I had a chance on landing this part. But now I was getting pumped up. Not only was I going on a big-time movie audition, I might actually have a chance on getting the part. He also had one more request: Go into the audition in character. That is, become John Lennon. Speak like him, walk like him. So, I did my best and even threw a piece of gum in my mouth to give the full effect. Anyone who is a Beatles fan will know what I'm talking about. Try to find film clips of Lennon not chewing gum. Doesn't exist. He was one of rock 'n roll's rebellious gum chewers.

I went to the casting office where I sat on the proverbial "casting couch" with some of the most beautiful women I had ever seen in my life. The casting director came out and made small talk with everyone except me. "Joanna, how was that film with Nicholson? Diana, you look fabulous, when do you start filming with Scorsese?" I was handed a page of script to learn and studied the 5 or 6 lines as if I was cramming for a final. When one of the women was called in, she passed me and said, "It's not hard to see what part you're going for." Oh man! That's all I needed to hear. The adrenaline was racing through my body. I could actually land this part! I wonder if I'll have to share my trailer.

My name was called, and I entered a tiny room with the director, casting director and a videographer who was taping the audition. All the while I stayed in character doing my best Lennon impersonation. After some small talk, I read my lines, and it was over, just like that. As I left the room, the casting director, looking confused, grabbed my arm and asked where I was from. "Upstate New York," I answered in my best Liverpool accent.

I was beyond excited. I jumped in my car, headed for the Holland Tunnel and on the ride home decided that I'll definitely have to change my name. I had to go to work the next day and never left my office for fear that I would miss the call from the agent. It never came. I called him later in the day, and he said if I didn't hear from them by the following day, then they're probably not interested. Like most job interviews, they only call you if you get the gig. Well, I didn't.

A few years later I read somewhere that the movie was booed at the Sundance Film Festival primarily because of the subject matter and eventually went straight to DVD. I

had no interest in sitting through a film about Mark David Chapman and to this day have never seen it. Funny, isn't it? How easy it was to get mesmerized and charmed by the notion that I'd have a chance to be on the big screen in a Hollywood movie no matter how good or bad it was. People will do anything to get there, and I guess I was no different. Maybe that's why there are so many dreadful movies these days.

As I look back, I think how surreal it would have been to play John Lennon, my idol, on the big screen in a movie not about his life, but his death. Now, when someone asks, "Did anyone ever tell you that you look like John Lennon?" I smile and say, "as a matter of fact..."