BOOK REVIEWS

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO PEGGY SUE?

A Memoir by Buddy Holly's Peggy Sue

By Peggy Sue Gerron and Glenda Cameron

(Published by Togi Entertainment)

I enjoyed this book much more than I thought I would. It is not what I expected, but better. What does it tell us that we did not already know? Jerry Allison (ex-husband of Peggy Sue and drummer of The Crickets): A bad boy who hung out with hoodlums who had just got "out of the pen". A stalker. Probably a racist. Smoked. Drank. Had lots of girlfriends. In California he smoked his special weed. Hit Peggy Sue, and hit the wall so hard he broke his hand. Often angry or depressed. Fired his gun at her in her cookbooks! "A manager rather than a leader."

Their relationship: They had what she describes as "their final breakdown" in 1958, but then continued to get together and break up for the next eleven years. It seems that she never loved him. "Standing at the wedding ceremony with a broken heart. The biggest mistake of my life." In the spring of '62 she left him and went back to Lubbock. A week later they got married again (in a Catholic church). In September '64 she went to Lubbock, again, to file for divorce, and this time Ji got baptized a Catholic, and they got back together. For those following the saga, they finally broke up in 1967. A couple of footnotes: for some reason, when Jerry was in a good mood, he called her 'Steve'. And it was just after Holly's funeral that Allison announced he was to be called 'JI' and no longer 'Jerry'.

What do we learn about Holly? Always kind and understanding, like his parents, but could erupt when pushed. When his car got blocked by some hoods, he reached for his gun and said, "You son of a bitch. I'm giving you five seconds to move that fucking car and then I'm going to start shootin'." And what of his other relationships? We learn that he was continuing to meet "the Lubbock girl with the bad reputation" and helped her when she got pregnant. "Really, I loved her", he reportedly said of her.

And what about his marriage? Well, if Peggy Sue's was odd, Holly's was downright bizarre. Except when she went shopping, Maria Elena seems to have been in a permanently bad mood, often never speaking to anyone, and simply "shaking her head in disapproval". Right from the start of the joint honeymoon (that Holly, oddly, referred to as a "vacation" rather than a honeymoon), she told Holly and Allison to stop playing around, and spent the evening eating alone in her room.

Several times it is pointed out how much older Maria was, and how much older and controlling she acted. On the honeymoon Holly supposedly said to Peggy Sue, "Jerry doesn't begin to know what he has. He should be married to someone like Maria, and then, maybe, he'd appreciate how damn lucky he is." Nowhere do Holly and Maria seem to show any signs of affection.

Although Maria and Jerry seem to have spent some of the honeymoon as drinking buddies, she soon turned against him, and the day after the New York string session, on yet another shopping trip, she said to Peggy Sue, "If he thinks he can't be replaced, he should think twice".

And as we know, Maria has absolutely no time for Norman Petty (The Crickets' manager and producer), and after the funeral (which she didn't actually attend), she apparently told Peggy Sue, "I'm going to get the man who killed Buddy". Her take is that Holly had to go on tour to make money because Norman was withholding. However, Peggy Sue says Norman had always paid in the past, and that the assets were being held up by the promoter, Manny Greenfield. One of the most bizarre passages in the book is when Maria accuses Norman of looking up her skirt (Jimmy Self passed that pearl on to Peggy Sue).

And in the 'too much information' category we learn that the morning after her wedding night, Maria showed Peggy Sue the blood on her sheets (to prove she had been a virgin). In the same vein she tells us that on her own wedding night, Jerry told her to go out and buy a douche bag.

What about Holly's relationship with Peggy Sue? As we know from the publicity surrounding the release of this book, Peggy Sue claims that Holly was planning to divorce Maria, and told Peggy Sue she should do the same. (He told her that Jerry was going on stage drunk, and carrying on with other women. In fact, at Holly's request, Norman had flown up to Richmond, Virginia to speak to Jerry about his behaviour.) Holly apparently told her, "After I get my divorce, I'm going to take care of you. I promise I'm going to fix everything." However, no one seems to corroborate this, and it is interesting that during the six weeks between 'The Crickets' break-up in mid-November and the Winter Dance Party tour that started in late January, Holly had not tried to get hold of her.

A couple of other odd points: Maria firmly denies to Peggy Sue that she is a Catholic (like Peggy Sue), which seems surprising for a Puerto Rican. And Peggy Sue finds it odd that there are no childhood pictures of Maria in her aunt's apartment (though I'm not sure what this might imply; that she wasn't who she claimed to be, perhaps?)

Also, Peggy Sue received a letter, which her parents read and kept from her; that 'challenged Jerry and Buddy's friendship.' Peggy Sue: "Are you saying they're queer?' Daddy: 'That's what the letter indicates. It also indicates they have pictures.' Which now means that there have been gay rumours about Norman, Vi, Norma Jean, Holly and Allison. What fun they must have had in Clovis during those all night recording sessions!

Music: What do we learn about songwriting, performing, recording? Nothing. However, it seems that we can thank Peggy Sue for broadening Holly and Allison's musical taste. In 1956 they were still playing country, but she was listening to Hank Ballard and Lloyd Price. We also learn how Holly lost his temer with Sonny Curtis, who was having difficulty learning the guitar part of 'Brown Eyed Handsome Man'. (She tells us that the first time she met Sonny, he 'reeked of alcohol', but later in New York, all was forgiven when he shared his sandwich with her. True to his nature, Jerry had refused to give her any money.) Another piece of musical information we learn is that the reason Vi Petty played such hard piano on 'Think It Over' was not - as we had previously been told - that Holly discarded her pianobook, but rather that she had been interrupted by Norman while she was trying to do some gardening! Also, I knew that Jerry 'Ivan' had performed solo in Charleston, West Virginia, lip-syncing to 'Real Wild Child', but I hadn't known he played the ukulele at the same time.

Peggy Sue also expects us to believe this piece of dialogue, after Nikki Sullivan left The Crickets, and they were looking for a replacement:

Holly: "We have to find another guitar player for the dance band." [!] Allison: "The only one I know is Curtis [the only one? Lubbock seems to have been full of them], and he's into country".

Holly: "Do you think he can play rock?" [This less than a year after he played on 'Rock Around With Olive Vee']

Something else I had not realized was that - until they heard about the plane crash - Jerry and Joe B. did not even know that Holly had gone on tour, with another group of Crickets. There had been no communication between Holly and the boys since mid-November, when Holly had said he had to be in New York for professional reasons, and Jerry said he and Joe B. would keep the Crickets' name. Considering that Jerry and Peggy Sue were living in Clovis (and Joe B. would often stay with them), which is less than 2 hours' drive from Lubbock, it was extraordinary that the news had not reached them along the musicians' grapevine. Nor did they know that Holly had been home to Lubbock for Christmas.

Writing style: Although the audience for this book must be primarily fans of Holly and The Crickets, it seems - based on the way it's written - to be aimed at more of a daytime TV-watching audience, who will accept the author for the way she has overcome adversity. Which is why it contains passages that really do not appeal to

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