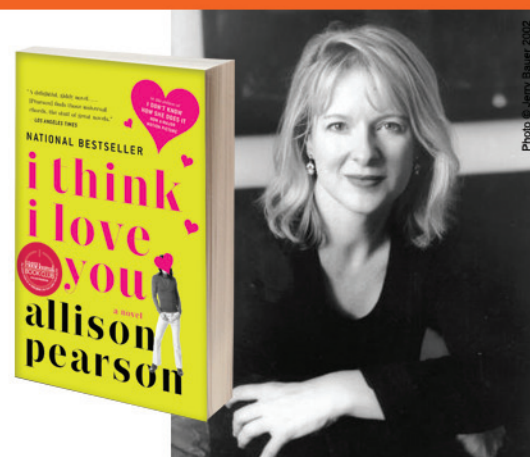


Random House Author Q&A

I Think I Love You, a novel by Allison Pearson



*In 1974, the biggest musical star in the world was David Cassidy (a fan club of 30 million teens is nothing to sneeze at). Author Allison Pearson was one of the young girls who claimed Cassidy as her first love—a time in her life so significant that as an adult, she wrote a book about it: this month's LHJ Book Club pick, *I Think I Love You*. LHJ's Lauren Piro spoke with Allison about how she turned a teen idol obsession into a case study on love and growing up, and the music that's a thread through it all.*

LHJ: I know I'm starting at the end, but I loved your interview with David Cassidy printed at the back of book—he was so candid about his days as a pop idol. Did that interview give you the idea to write the book?

AP: Actually I was thinking about it after I'd written my first book, *I Don't Know How She Does It* [now a movie opening on September 16]. I was in Norway publicizing the book, and I was sitting with all these women from my publisher, and they asked me what my next book might be about. And I said, "I'm thinking about writing something about a girl who is obsessed with David Cassidy." Immediately all the women around the table started to chat about their teen crushes—"I loved David Cassidy! I loved Donny Osmond!" And there was one woman, the Norwegian translator for *I Don't Know How She Does It*, and she was a very refined-looking, quiet, academic type of person, and I started to feel a bit uncomfortable. I thought, "Oh my God, she's thinking, 'Who are these idiot women talking about some pop star from 1974?'" But then she looked at me when there was a gap in the conversation and said, "But he was mine." And I thought, that's it! We all thought he was ours—including me. So when I was writing the book I put a little sticky note on my computer that said "but he was mine," and I wrote toward that feeling.

It's such an amazing emotion in a young girl's life. It doesn't last for very long, but when it's there, oh boy, it's the dress rehearsal for love.

LHJ: It would have been very easy to satirize or make light of a teen girl's obsession with a pop star, but you took it very seriously—it felt so genuine and honest.

AP: When I started digging into my research on David Cassidy, I realized—to my absolute horror—that I remembered more about David Cassidy than I could about men who I'd actually lived with! I could remember his birthday, the names of his pets—I thought it was amazing. That kind of love is a very potent thing, and I was interested in exploring what it meant.

I think women are natural romantic novelists, and the teen crush is the first love story we tell ourselves, and to some extent we go on throughout our lives telling ourselves stories about love. There's a line in the book when the journalist for the David Cassidy magazine, Bill, has told Petra that he was actually the one who wrote all of the David Cassidy letters and she gets disappointed, feeling like it was all a lie. And he says, "No, it was an incredible love story and you told it to yourself with all your heart, and it was true."

LHJ: I loved how the Bill character opened a door to explore the other not-so-loving side of the David Cassidy phenomenon.

AP: I knew I wanted to write about the obsessive fandom side of it. Petra was going to be obsessed with David in a very heartfelt way, so I needed another way to introduce some other perspective on this teen crush, a comic reflection on these very idealistic teen girls. I went to a David Cassidy and The Osmonds reunion concert with my friend Tim, a rock critic. And of course, he was kind of appalled by the idea of going to see these '70s heartthrobs in a stadium with a bunch of screaming women, all having a great time. But as he sat next to me, carefully writing in his notebook, I suddenly thought, "Oh, yes. There would have been some boy there watching all of these girls go crazy."

I also started bidding for lots of memorabilia on eBay and got these David Cassidy magazines, some of the very ones I had—they were like sacred texts, I knew the photographs like they were from a family album. As I was reading them it occurred to me that, of course, they were put together by a team of journalists and not written by David Cassidy in the San Fernando Valley. So that became Bill—this guy who wants to be a real rock journalist but he's got this job at *The Essential David Cassidy Magazine*, which he's completely mortified by, but also has him kind of intrigued by the power of it all.

LHJ: Music plays a role in the novel even beyond David Cassidy's songs—Petra is a cellist who goes on to have a career in music therapy.

AP: I thought that Petra would have a mother that was very disapproving of her pop star crush, and thought she'd probably be keen on classical music, so I made Petra a cellist. I saw a picture of

English cellist Natalie Klein, and she was exactly like I imagined Petra—dark, intense, very pretty and very tiny. Through a mutual friend, I sent her an e-mail and said, “Dear Natalie, please do not be alarmed, but you appear to be the heroine of my new novel.” She let me come to see her give a master class to some kids, and she’s just extraordinary. Petra’s cello lesson in the book is one of the things I’m most proud of having written.

And then I thought, what would this wonderful, sensitive, slightly damaged girl grow up to be? I thought she probably wouldn’t have had the confidence to become a soloist, but I’d become interested in the idea of music therapy. I took a weekend course on it in London, and it’s such an amazing thing. It’s used with kids who are locked into all kinds of problems, from social issues to congenital conditions, and it’s miraculous what music can do. I think this is at the heart of the book—music can rhyme and music can solve, and the book came to be a celebration of that.

LHJ: I remember, I was so pleased when I got to the second half of the book, and Petra was still playing her cello, because you get the feeling at the beginning that her friends are going to make her want to give it up, like it’s not cool enough.

AP: It was very vivid to me how treacherous those teenage girl friendships can feel—the unexploded minefield of “are you going to be in today, are you going to be cool, will you have someone to have lunch with?” And then I thought about how vital female friendships are to me in my life now. I wanted to write something of a hymn to female friendship, and the support and laughs that women get from each other—Petra and her friend Sharon are one of the love stories in the book.

LHJ: Do you think Petra and Kate Reddy, the protagonist in *I Don’t Know How She Does It*, have any affinities? They’re both modern women at least partly modeled after your life.

AP: They both come from my heart, though Petra is closer to me in background. They both have a quality of yearning and are pretty sensitive people. They’re both dealing with work, home, and kids, though Kate’s got younger children. When *I Don’t Know How She Does It* came out I got lots of letters from women who said, “You think that’s bad? Wait until she has teenagers!” And, of course, adult Petra has a teenager as I do now. It was an inspiration for me seeing my daughter Evie and the crushes she has. It’s so touching hearing her say, “No, Robert Pattinson really does eat this cereal!” She read it in a magazine! I just think, oh here we go again.

LHJ: I heard you’re working on a musical version of *I Think Love You*.

AP: Yes, it’s my first attempt at writing a musical, and I’m really loving it. And it won’t only have David Cassidy songs, but also many of the wonderful songs from that era. It’s amazing how just

a couple bars or a single line from these songs can take you back—they have this time-traveling quality that's very powerful. There are some lovely scenes where Sharon and Petra are on stage with their younger selves. In one part they sing the "*The Way We Were*" to each other.

And David Cassidy has been such a great hero for me and he absolutely adores the book, so maybe if the musical comes to Broadway he can come out of the smoke and be him again! At Petra's age it was all I wanted for David Cassidy to come to me, but now it's like I can come full circle. To write a musical in which David Cassidy would appear, I would die happy.