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Mayor Emanuel Interviews Best-Selling Author and Biographer Jonathan Eig on “Chicago Stories”

On this week's episode of “[Chicago Stories](#),” Mayor Emanuel sat down with writer Jonathan Eig, the best-selling author of works on Muhammad Ali, Al Capone, the birth control pill, and others, to talk about how he picks his subjects, what's surprised him about each one, and what he's working on next.

Jonathan never thought he'd be a biographer. Instead, he got his start as a reporter after graduating from Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism in 1986.

“I just wanted to be a newspaper reporter,” Jonathan told Mayor Emanuel, “and never thought I'd aspire to books.”

But after years of writing, along with a move into magazines, Jonathan began developing ideas for books and thought he might as well give it a shot.

Now over ten years later, he's standing atop a body of work that has taken him to baseball fields, boxing rings, prohibition saloons, and rogue science labs, and finding surprises in all of them.

“With every book there's a different story,” Jonathan said, “but often there's just the realization that this is an important story that needs to be told, and maybe there's something new to say about it and hopefully it's something I'm passionate about.”

That passion's needed for the effort that's required. Jonathan's latest work alone—*Ali: A Life*—took four years, and covered over 600 interviews, not to mention the endless hours of research through countless books, newspaper stories, public records requests, and more.

But as time goes by, the work pays-off as a full person and full story begin to emerge through its contradictions, flaws, and humanity.

“You embrace the complexity,” Jonathan said. “You ask the reader to trust you that in the end it will feel like a complete person and that it might feel like more of a real person, and that's really the goal—to make people feel like human beings.”

Be sure the check out the full episode as Jonathan tells Mayor Emanuel about the subjects he didn't cover, his upcoming book on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and even throws a few questions at the mayor himself.

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