

JOHN PAUL KIRKHAM

ZIG ZAG  
ROAD



# **ZIG ZAG ROAD**

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## Introduction

The poetry and prose is part prequel, sequel and companion to the 2011 anthology of poems *"In Violet"* and the autobiography *"I Saw Her Standing There"* that was published during the Covid 19 pandemic.

The places and everyone that appear in these poems are real and among many you will discover *"Dick The Barber"* and *"Doctor Robert"* and *"Elvis"* did make his appearance.

Born in the 1950s, growing up in Merseyside, training at the Laird School of Art in photography and design, Liverpool became a special place and many of the poems remember life, events and death in the north west of England.

As a photographer, capturing atmospheric moments in time in different monochrome shades has always been my preferred way of recording the joy or bleakness of light and so it is with poetry. Some of the poems recall

events as in that *"Cat in the Park"* or *"Zephyrs"* which visually appear stark, shocking and brutal but in no way are meant to offend and possibly offer instead a cautionary tale when words can often be mesmerising and hauntingly contemplative and in the end make you hopefully more thoughtful.

Scattered randomly throughout the book are a series of Haiku works inspired and woven by our natural world of sensual humanity, remembering that poetry is often written to stir emotion or passion. If any of the writings make you smile or weep or even angry, then maybe they have been worthwhile.

Whilst all of the people in the poems are existent and not imaginary, one or two of the names have been slightly altered or changed.

And as for *"Zig Zag Road"* ... you will meander there in the end ... and yes it really does exist and it is a road I have travelled and walked a thousand times or more.

Merseyside has two Zig Zag Roads, mine is close to the River Mersey, New Brighton, where I grew up but I guess we all have our own winding lanes that can lead us to often unexpected places.

John Paul Kirkham is a poet, writer, photographer living in the city of Liverpool and is the author of twenty books and collaborations including *In Violet* a large collection of poems that was published to rave reviews with award winning poetry and the autobiography *I Saw Her Standing There*, and is the official biographer of two Italian saints: Clare of Assisi and Gemma Galgani of Lucca. John Paul has written journal editorial, film and book reviews and has appeared both on television and radio.

And thank you

To Judie Tzuke for giving permission to use her song lyrics as a prologue and epilogue in the journey ahead. Visit Judie's website to find out more - [www.tzuke.com](http://www.tzuke.com)

## Prologue

*They shut the gates at sunset  
After that you can't get out  
You can see the bigger picture  
Find out what it's all about  
You're open to the skyline  
You won't want to go back home  
In a garden full of angels  
You will never be alone  
But oh, the road is long  
The stones that you are walking on  
Have gone  
With the moonlight to guide you  
Feel the joy of being alive  
The day that you stop running  
Is the day that you arrive*

(Judie Tzuke: "Enjoy The Ride")

## All for an Empire - Part II

All for an empire

conscripted to hellfire

those who fought

and thought

and died for a king ... for peace ... for freedom

honourably remembered and rightly so

on some memorial obelisk

within a quiet country parish green or churchyard

victims of deception and death

But beneath these glorious trees of an English Eden

buried deep lies

the scandal of those who lied and died

and left behind their teenage brides

for what Haig termed ignoble crimes

and shame on Major too

to deny the final rights so due



Shell shocked fatigued and weary worn  
from mental shrapnel all around  
execution for the coward  
dishonourable death their fair reward  
to perish on another tree of staken oak  
murdered there by friends not foes

Given twelve hours to write and pray  
a scandal dammed to disobey  
six armed men at break of day  
set before the seal of fate  
tied blindfold to the oaken stake

The echo of their rifle shots  
into some young sons bleeding heart  
dawn chorus fearful flies the lark  
mainly conscripts manly boys  
the 6.00am innocent sacrifice  
all for an empire  
loyalty and lies

## Haiku No 1

Gentle wind blows east  
Drawn in beyond the cosmos  
Cherry blossom falls

## **Avalon**

The sceptred stone sits  
beneath the snowy peaks  
ravaged raw  
waiting for its King to come

For winter mists  
hasten into spring  
when a poor sovereign in disguise may pass this way  
to draw a sword  
from beneath the skies of Avalon

Fair now fades the phlox cyclamen  
winter's old cold flowers  
ringed round the rocks  
for glinting icy cut steel pulled for a dream  
beside the turquoise stream  
under a setting sun  
stealing shooting stars

before the black nights dawn  
of Avalon

A barren stone now stands  
under silent fallow clouds  
and witch hazels  
once burst with copper ovate wispy finger blossom  
now perfume the new seasons boreal divine air  
and the saffron yellow aconites carpet spread  
before the King of Avalon

## **Before Bill Popped His Clogs**

Bill my other grandad popped his clogs in the fifties  
in his 50s  
before I were born

Lying about his age  
defying the law  
keeping the law  
sailing up the Yangtze  
on the HMS Dragonfly  
before the war

Deserting legally the navy  
instead a runaway navvy  
fiddling with Bristol Bulldogs  
and other nefarious schemes got you discharged  
not quite honourably  
who else can say they served of sorts  
in three of the three forces

You deserted again your family  
when your son was born  
and died of a hare lip  
running away to drift  
blagging and bagging your way  
to become Bob Hope's and Bing Crosby's caddie  
leaving your dad to plaster alone at home  
and business to crumble

A move next door but one to Lowry in Mottram  
becoming his friend for a time  
a model for a while  
sitting in Piccadilly Gardens on that bench  
bowler hat in a corner  
and the man on the wall but no-one ever knew  
apart from the red carnation  
flowering from a breast pocket

An adventurous life some may say  
it was years smoking tea leaves that did you in the end  
I have a photocopy of a photo  
rare so rare an image  
of a old looking northern war worn man in his fifties  
holding a pint to the camera  
Guinness ... mild ... or brown ale I can't tell  
its monochrome  
and before I were born

## **Bird Bombers of Liverpool**

Liverpool survived the blitz ... but it was touch and go  
and we did lose a few chippies in the mix

Today the terror is not them Stuka's and Messerschmitts  
or those other Fokker's

it's those diving bird bombers of Church Street

fearless they are them gulls and pigeons

driving our Judy in her Friday night curlers

to dash for cover into Primark or Lush

as they loop, swoop and poop at head height

excited by your donut, chips and fish batter

they'll get you in the end

but please not on my new DM's

they target groups of weekend hens

dropping from on high

on a new dress

on exposed flesh

evacuating white and greenie gooey guano

to tangle with a perm



There's a homeless fella  
sits in a doorway in Whitechapel  
with a "Help Me" cardboard plea  
the pigeons will sit not shit  
on his head and shoulders  
they can sense a sensitive soul  
offering grains of rice and a squished spring roll  
refuelling before a second air raid  
down Lord Street and the Pier Head

## **Broken Bones**

How many people can claim that  
breaking their leg  
saved their life  
twice

Seconds from signing for those red devils  
shattered bones stunned the cheering crowds  
on that Saturday afternoon  
putting pay to those Korean battlefields

Well convalesced and working for the GPO  
manning the top floor midnight Dial Tower shift  
he took the call from the cold  
and broke the news first of more broken bones  
and death  
in Munich

## Close Encounters in The Back Garden and Beyond

Just before dawn  
hovering at tree height  
over the dewy lawn  
orange disc  
gently floating adrift  
grey faces staring from a window  
wishing to be seen though  
for just a second  
before a puff and shoot to outer space  
or somewhere beyond

Trinity of silver spheres  
sliding gliding near  
stationary ... pulsating  
watching and waiting  
to make the first move  
then an almighty vroom  
hurtle and hightail to planet zoom  
or another world

## **Come Don't Fly With Me**

I fly for a reason  
not for fun ... anymore  
is it fearful to fly  
like birds in the sky  
and possible the reason why  
I ask you not to fly with me

Thick trails of dirty black smoke  
from the rear of a BAC ... One Eleven  
forcing a landing at Leeds Bradford

A hole in the engine  
Seven Four Seven  
burn out in flames  
after Bahrain  
forced to limp lamely  
and fly lowly  
BA into Changi Singapore

You would think the best would be safe  
Singapore Air short circuiting from water leaks  
a drenched cabin  
plunging the Big Top into darkness for twelve hours  
all because a light bulb popped  
and pumps lost their power

Followed by a storm  
racing into the valley  
rattling and shaking  
just missing  
almost clipping  
the pine tree tops  
passengers screaming  
*"we're all going to die"*  
the pilot regains control  
to get us down into Lourdes  
I knew we would be safe there  
despite the tachycardia

Air UK a calm breakfast  
out of Stansted  
then a BANG!  
a lurch  
an instant sharp dive  
the short haul Aerospace One Four Six  
one of its engines has exploded mid air  
and we can't turn round  
to corkscrew into Manchester Ringway  
our hostess has to shift passengers  
to balance the craft from tilting  
it takes a great skill  
to navigate into Edinburgh  
as we brace  
sirens singing  
blue lights flashing  
shadowing our final descent  
to a bumpy ... well almost perfect  
more importantly ... safe landing

Quietly sleeping before an erupting racket  
seatbelts were off  
sudden drop  
we all lift off  
two feet  
out of our seats  
over the middle east  
plane dipping  
and spinning  
wildly  
... sandstorm  
breaching and belching  
through the Tristar's triple tail engines  
the sound so intense like machine gun fire  
ricocheting round the cabin  
food trolleys laden and rolling away  
down the aisles to smash and dash  
against the galley doors  
putting pay to anymore snoozing  
and boozing

The airline had already been reprimanded and fined  
for being stingy on their gasoline

but here we were again

M . A . S . on approach to K. L. International

too foggy to land at 5am

and forty five minutes of fuel left to burn

Penang was now too far to reach

a failed approach

causing us to abort

and now only 25 minutes left

just enough for one final attempt

circling as long as possible

and that humid clammy fog

hampering the blind glide

bracing yet again

our cushioned heads

as we landed on fumes

So next time I may fly alone or not at all

whatever ... come ... don't fly with me



## Haiku No 2

Stays, drifts and falling  
Caressing the dawn rooftops  
Autumn leaves again

## COVID - A Call To Arms

November 5th bommy night was quite subdued  
and it was miserable and damp as well  
still ... we managed a few good flashes and a bang or two  
late into the night  
breaking the midnight curfew  
so there would still be some spent rockets to gather  
that will have ricocheted off the garden shed roof  
or next doors chimney pot

Just on the cusp of a grey dawn  
before any cock could crow  
opening the blinds and window  
to inhale last nights  
hanging smokey salt peter aerial infusions  
through the hovering dense fog  
I spied a shimmering misty camouflaged convoy  
two thousand troops  
heading to Pontin's Holiday Camp in Formby

Later that day in the centre of our ghost city  
the lone soldier in command  
gets out his gun  
aims at the terrified old ladies head and shouts aloud  
*“thirty seven point two”*

## **Damn That Torpedo**

A slow reverse from Pier 54 into the Hudson River  
elegantly turned by twin tugs  
into the pale May midday hazy New York sun  
steaming and stoked ready for a calm hometown run

Waiting ... waiting the stalker bides his time ...

U20

the terror laden tubes of menace  
just ten past two ... ten miles from shore  
perfect light ... perfect strike ... starboard dive  
cold the water inward flows

Shouts and screams  
confusion reigns  
lifeboats crash  
and crush the rush  
choking cries  
pulled down and petrified

Hordes diving like rats from their gilded cage  
rivets creak and pop  
snagging the clambering drop  
turbine's hum louder  
propeller blades rising out of the sea  
to tangle, mangle and slice  
a humming orchestra of death

A cold blooded enemy watches, records and notes  
and slinks away to the west to deeper waters

As the masted deck  
glides relentlessly to stricken depths  
the last passenger  
Barbara Anderson aged just two  
lost and clinging to a submerging deck  
is bravely lifted into the arms  
of Purser and Scouser Billy Harkness  
cradling her escape seconds from doom

The stern swings slightly and judders  
before immersing vertically to its seabed grave  
exploding beneath the waves  
releasing a tidal wave of corpses and foam  
a boiling cauldron in a wilderness  
... then a placid sea  
and the wreckage left was only human

Drifting on the tide off Kinsale Head  
the Peel Fleet Wanderers sail into the Irish Sea breeze  
to trawl and catch the surfacing surviving living flotsam  
and amid the weeping for twelve hundred drowned  
a lone voice carries across a setting sun  
*"Damn that Torpedo"*

It's May again and I take a walk  
along Canning Dock waterfront prom  
shielding momentarily my eyes  
from the glinting bronze propeller  
a salvaged savage memory  
memorial in the hazy sun

On the smooth worn cobbles

a child lays a single Cunard red rose

that is gently blown, rolls and tumble's away into the  
Mersey

Sailing away to be reunited with Lusy's lost souls and  
loved ones

### Haiku No 3

Burnt orange sunset

Your flower has a pink tint

Lanceolate and sweet



## **Dancing the Sun Down**

I came upon a summer fair  
and found a girl with golden hair  
and on the grass her feet were bare

She wore a wildflower daisy crown  
arms outstretched she whirled around  
and I watched her dance a wild sundown

## December Scape

For midwinter it's mild  
a solitary clanky cyclist pedals lethargically  
along Mockbeggar Wharf and North Shore prom  
onward and flatly to Meols

A puffing panting and passing Frenchie  
pauses hoping for rest between Leasowe Castle  
and the lighthouse  
but a pat on the head is the best I can offer  
as the sun slowly slides in a declining dip

The tide is ebbing fast  
revealing rippled amber sand  
receding rolling mercury with hands of foam

A wellied bait digger  
casting long shadows  
stakes his claim with a bucket and fork  
and his lantern torch

Liverpool Bay once home to Roman bones  
succumbs suddenly  
to a smoky sky of indigo grey  
the slightly chilly sea breeze whips up a whisker  
through the liminal light  
teasing through the dunes marram grass and scapes

## **Dick The Barber**

Lets go into the parlour of Dick the Barber  
in Vicky Road New Brighton  
from behind his curtained back room cupboard  
like Mr. Benn's tailor he appeared like theatre  
a walrus moustachioed magician  
wearing his nylon grey jacket with maroon cuffs  
scissors and blade at the ready

If you were under ten he'd sit you on a wooden plank  
a balanced bridge on the hairdressers chair  
so your heads erect with available hair  
as I graduated out of NHS glasses, rashes  
and spray gun bay rum splashes  
and crazy short back and sides  
set worryingly alight for a smokey singed ending

Dick knew all the towns comings and goings  
but mainly the comings  
tonsonial tales of life on the liners  
snipping here smoothing where its bare  
with lurid tales to turn you green  
about shaving ladies below decks  
nudge nudge wink wink  
he'd seen and performed it all down stairs

*"What will it be today, anything but a perm"*  
they do those in our new Liscard precinct  
so he created a Ziggy and for a year or two  
I was just an insane lad  
the metallic electric orange dye I had to do at home  
which got me expelled halfway through my O-levels

Old men on the waiting corner leather bench  
for a simple cut or massage with a white waffle towel  
expired fag ends dangling from their lips ... like limp  
dicks ... Dick would say

He knew about Julie  
and Cherry my muse in Dalmorton Road  
and always proffered *"something for the weekend young  
man"* (no sirs here)  
his one ... well two house rules ...  
*"always be prepared"*  
and *"better safe than sorry my lad"*  
whilst stuffing two free johnnies in my pocket

He was like an uncle Dick to me  
and when I needed a job CV  
he conceived a cursive bespoke note in royal blue  
fountain pen ink  
composed creatively in his other parlour above his  
barber ... shop  
and it did get me my job

He semi retired to Wallasey Village  
a posher parlour  
keeping his hands flexed part time  
in peoples affairs ... of the heart  
and then it was time for me to convert  
from a starman to a cosmic sage  
and it was off to get some curly permed locks in Liscard  
and my abandonment of Dick  
and his fading braided burgundy cuffs

## **Distant Outsiders**

As distant outsiders

we observe from the comfort of a television screen

or newspaper tragedies that unfold each day

glimpsing superficially perhaps

... chaos, crisis and emergency

life in a cramped asylum seeking refugee camp

in familiar or forgotten places

striving to find a little piece of peace and love



## Doctor Robert

Dr Robert was an eccentric fella  
on his surgery wall a Spitfire propellor

His waiting room dog sleeps under the chairs  
blissfully sleeping unawares

On the floor in the corner I spied some liquorice sticks  
but closer inspection revealed them as sausage dog shit

To release trapped blood under my nail  
he rummaged for tools he said never failed

A sewing needle held in pliers  
into a bunsen burner and the blue flame fire

He misjudged the angle it wasn't quite right  
a whoosh of draught air and the wallpapers alight

Nail pierced shoots red fountain pen ink  
splattering my face I puked in his sink

## Haiku No 4

Peacock screams and struts

Three pillars a perfect pair

Fan wings open wide

## Dyeing for a Living

At school they taught us  
all about Marco Polo's Silk Road  
my nan said *"you can ignore all that  
the Silk Road begins in Rawtenstall through the Ribble Valley  
and ends at Arkwrights in Preston"*

*"When I were a girl even before my teens  
I doffed and spun them machines  
and dusted white cotton snow  
from under the clattering hammers"*

Her dad was a bleacher and his dad a dyer  
impregnating cloth  
with shale alum mordant  
from the Yorkshire coast  
he was gaffer of purples, violets and indigo's  
casks of snails and sacks of woad  
steamed and boiled in barrels and becks  
twisted ... scoured ... and rung again

then hoisted high on tenter hooks  
and the clear river water that feeds the mill  
leaves as ultramarine  
then the tales would turn to Dolly Blue

## Elegy for a Gentle Man

In 1952 all you had in your pocket  
was the correct fare for a passage  
from Dublin to Holyhead ... Anglesey  
and the train to Liverpool  
with maybe a night or two to spare in a boarding house  
if you could find a kind Irish soul  
in Everton's fair valley

A tip off and enquiry in Church Street's  
George Henry Lee's  
opened your door as a tea and post boy in the basement  
as the decades past the steam would rise within you  
to become our Captain Peacock  
leading the charge and being in charge  
of haberdashery on the top floor

It was 1971 when we became your neighbour  
you never bought but rented rooms  
on Mrs Delaney's upper floors  
over the fence and always willing to lend a hand  
gardening and building strange things with bricks  
it was the first time we actually "adopted" someone next  
door

When you joined the sea angling club  
you used banana skins for bait  
which I think was too big for our cods gob  
then the rescue dog  
came along

Joby ...

it took me a minute to work that out

Joe Bibby

Joe B

sometimes using our disused coal bunker as a kennel

World Cup 1972 our first colour telly  
I told you it was magic  
shout at the TV what channel you wanted  
and it changed in a flash  
amazing this ... BBC1 ... ITV  
my brother was hiding behind our lounge door  
remote control in hand

You walked everywhere from Wallasey ...  
to Liverpool via the Runcorn Bridge  
to Chester via Hooton and the hootin' traffic  
with socks over your boots in winter  
to stop you slipping  
another daft idea ... that seemed to work!

Retirement came to one of those  
Poirot styles council flats on Leasowe Road  
and you let loose on a new lease of life  
a wackily invented musical wheelie bin  
powered by 45 batteries for Claires House Hospice  
made the local headlines

and a spot on Look North ... a TV star for two minutes

You said that chips were always colder in London than  
Liverpool but they were better at the Chinese buffet  
but nothing could beat your daily breakfast at Liscard's  
Willow Tree

And those John Lewis socials and parties that you  
organised became the stuff of fame and acclaim

First in the queue for the Ryanair one penny fares from  
John Lennon Airport  
just get on any flight ... Madrid ... Barcelona with a hand  
bag and ask the local taxi to take you to the cheapest  
bestest hotel in town

After 70 years and several attempts (I'm not sure how  
many)

a driving test passed and a new Astra banger  
in bright strawberry red  
to roam around but mainly get lost around Britain



but you could now take Stan to Mass on a Saturday night  
further down Leasowe Road at Our Lady of Lourdes  
I spotted you on Songs of Praise at our Cathedral  
on the front row as well

Joe in old age became a complainer ... well a  
campaigner

unhappy that old folk

had to climb 40 steps

to Wallasey Village Station

*"Good for the heart maybe but not for the legs"*

unhappy that volunteer meals on wheels were taken  
away from the WRVS

*"to save just two pence ... a scandal"*

but he did help save the Dome from Home from distress  
and disrepair

Well into his eighties and still going strong

out of the blue my dad got a call from the Fire Brigade

*"An old man had died at home, his electric blanket caught light and he died trying to put it out from smoke inhalation but we found your name and number in his blackened address book, sorry for the delay in informing you, this was last month"*

Whilst helping many he never received any awards and his passing pretty much went unknown under that big radar

just his neighbours clubbing together to sort out the arrangements

it was painfully sad

that after dying in a fire

he had to be cremated

and scattered at the Landican

Several years later Julie the girl who sold us a house and used to work at John Lewis ...

I said *"did you ever know a Joe Bibby"*

*"Legend"* she replied

but didn't know he'd died

*“What a pity ‘cos John Lewis would have looked after his funeral”*

If they had known ... really known

Joe the man

who would do anything

for anyone

## **Elemental Child**

Child of the northern fire  
fanning the flickering flame

Child of the western wind  
blowing the breathless breeze

Child of the eastern waters  
spraying the splashing seas

Child of the southern earth  
scattering the sowing seeds

## **End of the Day**

The golden copper orb slowly sinking  
is swallowed by a cumulous grey cavernous mouth  
carried down to the end of the day

## Everyone Knows Bobby Charlton

I happened upon a stretch of quiet beach  
the mantis green palms flayed lightly  
in an uncertain breeze  
the coarse abrasive sand now cooling in the early  
evening under a purple sky broodingly framing a round  
tangelo sun ... slowly setting over the striated etched  
horizon and the South China Sea

I sat upon a clutch of rocks worn to a smooth hollow  
by centuries of the gorging tide coming and going  
behind me a small array of attap houses on stilts stood  
still from which a Malay family took to the water  
laughing and splashing in the foaming surf  
swiping from the air and feasting on the live leaping  
sweet translucent prawns

They seemed careless carefree and simply happy  
in worn cotton shorts and torn Man Utd tee shirts  
flapping like flags

As the wind turned eastward  
they stepped out of the waist high waves to  
acknowledge me  
with a smile and greeting words  
*"Wer fom"*

I normally just say UK ... it's easier somehow  
but this evening thoughts turned to what home is  
and where home was  
and as my dad was from Lancs  
and in honour of their faded Red Devil shirts  
*"Manchester"* I say ... a confident bluff  
causing arms to wildly splay and display  
and in turn a broken English reply  
*"aaah Bobby Charlton"*

*Everyone Knows Bobby Charlton - a version was published in Football Poets  
- Swapping Shirts for Shakespeare. A reworking with a different theme appeared  
in the previous anthology "In Violet" but here it is reproduced for the first time  
in its intended original form.*

## Haiku No 5

Silk purple passion  
Entering the warm chamber  
Glory vine entwines



## **Execution of Duties**

In a quiet corner of a Staffordshire forest clearing  
the dawn chorus birdsong  
once fearful and long gone has finally returned

Three hundred and six sacrificial stakes  
standing ... innocently ... hauntingly  
and the burden of those weary souls  
finally laid to rest in peace

## **Fallen Leaves**

Even in a street without trees  
the falling leaves  
will find a way to your door

## Gene Dream

Here comes the twenty second century city  
shimmering buildings planted  
grown from the landscape  
orbs transport those that remain  
sparking shocks of flame and pain

The young reside in tall slim lockers  
behind thin grey doors  
their last post is missed  
forbidden thoughts become outcasts of the valley

The domain is permanently trapped in winter  
bare and bent  
duplicant's replicate the loosened of hell  
silent enclosure of the ancient parish garden  
contains the bones and souls  
of the forgotten generation

A feral child carries a bag of stones  
she knows how to throw  
at a passing clone  
weakness shows  
as the shattering genes  
bleed round red beads  
that spill and scuttle away to die

## **Ghosts Among The Stones**

Sharing strange tales from strange times  
the ghosts among the stones  
and as those shimmering spectres pass  
the days remain as yesterday  
it is to those times  
those places I shall return

## **Gloaming**

After what seems a season of suffering mizzle and gloom  
bent branches dripping  
hanging limp from sustained rain  
dank mist creating eerie halo holograms in the hollows  
the base of birch trees hidden and hovering  
like floating grey ghosts shimmering in the dusk light

## **Hiroshima**

Looking up to a clear bleached sky I can see  
the grey and black atomic human shadows  
blast etched by intense heat and light  
onto the white washed walls of Hiroshima  
the negative stains of mass destruction

The quietness of the park today is in harmony  
with the gently distant resonating bell  
tolled from dawn to dusk by those who yearn for peace  
a small group of school children run up to my bench  
and place in my hands their gathered flowers

**I Had a Dream I was Awake  
and Woke up to Find Myself in a Dream**

Stanley sat every day  
in his leather armchair  
on the balcony  
203 Oceana  
watching the Santa Monica sunrise

Reviewing the day to come  
letters to compose  
maybe someone will ring or call today  
asking for advice or an autograph

Its a long way from Ulverston, Cumbria  
music halls, theatres and dad's first picture palace  
yes a long long time  
ten years ago I lost my babe Ollie  
two of a kind me and my pal ... well oranges and  
lemons



Soon be time to pop on the old bowler  
for the late afternoon pacific boulevard stroll  
looking for my diary with long inconsistent gaps  
with how much love we made people laugh

After tea Stanley sits on the balcony  
in his leather armchair next to Ida  
watching the Santa Monica sunset  
and the sparkling sea  
each day a perfect day and early to bed

## Haiku No 6

Moon rises gently  
Illuminates forest floor  
River runs into sea

## **In Another Landscape**

Why did they lie to us  
parted in these fields of shame  
departing crime to hells domain

To a place of things we can't control  
to talk about tonight tomorrow we're told  
if by some fluke we may survive another day  
the storm of guns and thunder rages on

Take the darkest night  
and find the light  
so sad to think of home and forever England  
in this brown decaying slaying wilderness  
fair fades the flower in my pocket  
that photograph of Emily  
in another landscape

## **In Liverpool**

You're both home and abroad  
where the world spins meets and mingles  
Mathew street is the magnet  
to roll, fold and find your hippy hole

From the quay landing stage  
you are closer yes to Irelands green valleys  
but beyond

America appears close as the Atlantic grey blue horizon  
a nation taken by storm  
conquered by our Merseybeat invasion

But in the end we all come home  
and look back when we were younger  
standing on that corner  
clambering over still blitzed dust and rubble  
go cart from me ma's old pram racing round the green  
and the dream is still strong  
in my city where I belong

## **In The Fields of Wildflowers**

In the fields of wildflowers

we will weep

we will sing

we will heal

And I

and you

and they

will find our place

in the fields of wildflowers

We will entwine

a locked embrace

among tangled times

all our love

in the fields of wildflowers

We may fall  
we may rise  
to find our hope  
in shattered lives

But in the end we will find our peace  
in the fields of wildflowers

## **I Sat on a Wall in San Gimignano**

It was one of those late spring Italian dawns  
that reveals sparkling diamond frost just before sunrise  
but by lunch a heat that beats you back into the shade

These were the streets ... the Innocenti that Fina played  
her games in ... the house where she lay paralysed on a  
plank and died and sweet smelling white violets  
bloomed out of her decay

The Church of the Assumption just behind me  
display her bones waned and waxed again  
in life like effigy beneath her altar  
in the coolest part of the day

Evening beckons  
the shadows lengthen to distant bells  
silver wisps and strokes of woodsmoke  
rise from the tapestried valley below  
as I sit on Fina's wall in San Gimignano

## **Kamchatka**

The Sage from the west and the Sifu from the east  
meet outside the high city walls  
under a laden sky awaiting the dawn  
comparing their visions of the night

The air is yellow from the dust borne sunrise  
clouds rolling into thick white waves  
dancing to the tolling bell

Behind a shingle beach  
the wild wind blows away the harsh sharp sand  
revealing the old stone bunker  
open now to the elements  
once a closed confessional sanctuary to guns of war

The Sage and Sifu point their hemlock staffs to the stars  
Kamchatka and the eastern Kuril shakes  
whirlpool to the western depths  
awakes the slumbering Kraken  
chaos as we tamper with destruction



## **Killed by a Cat Shitting in The Park**

It was my first body forensically

Jane Doe

20 yrs old

laid out blotchy and eruptive

bright scarlet against a bleach white slab

toxoplasmosis

cut finger caressing the grass

while enjoying a picnic in the park

coming into contact with a cute cats crap

## Midsummer in Granchester

The meadows by the Cam are cut and folded away  
the light grassy dust mingles  
with meadowsweet pale pollen  
fresh from the frothy flowers  
bobbing backlit in a balmy haze dance

English tea and scones  
or buns  
jam and honeyed  
beneath the sweet orchard trees  
cups are raised at ten to three

Remembering those souls and Brook  
who roamed these hallowed grounds and land  
whom have lived and been and gone  
to further pastures wide and high and long  
or rest in Saints Andrew and Mary's graveyard beyond

The village shadows silently lengthen  
retiring and reclining in the garden of the Blue Ball Inn  
to the narcotic buzz of nectar bees  
competing with the hum  
of hovering evensong lawnmowers

## Haiku No 7

Once the tempest peaks  
Pine tree wet damp and dewy  
Moist glisten silky

## **Nan's Kitchen**

After grandad died  
in nineteen sixty five  
and after four further years in Bury, Lancashire  
and after much deliberation and suspicion  
Nan sold up and we all moved to a super big house  
on the prom  
in New Brighton

Deep down I just knew this was a disaster  
my mum and Nan simply never got on  
and annexed to the best front room with a view  
and the pokiest back bedroom  
then there was total conflict in the kitchen  
rows at night  
and who was right  
after three years the "For Sale" board appeared  
after all it was Nan's money that paid for all this  
disagreement  
and so was reached a compromise agreement

We ended up with another big house down by the river  
Nan a two up two down yellow brick terrace  
Zig Zag Road was the ten minute boundary  
but Nan installed her kitchen extension  
whence I earned my degree in culinary skills

The secret of scones the size of fists  
leftover dough for Chorley cakes  
egg custard tarts large as you like  
sterilised milk is the magic in the mix  
lard rubbed to crumbs butter to line the dish

Meat and tatty pie baked on a plate  
you need corned beef to disintegrate  
King Eddie's diced and boiled  
thick reduced oxo for gravy oil  
a plate balanced on a worn copper skillet  
to steam fish from the mersey  
caught from our rods nice and early  
with a Rake Lane delish  
one penny's worth of chips

Fray Bentos puddings in blue domed cans  
simmered in a dented deep old pan  
Snack's were ham and cheese  
from the counter at Woolies  
and condensed milk on sweet tinned peaches  
or Bournville chocolate ... dark brown silk

Conflict each Christmas  
who cooks the dinner  
mum or Nan  
only one is the winner  
our bone dry turkey  
sprouts and hard sharp tatoes  
or Nan in her apron  
eying her succulent castrated cock capon  
oh to be back in Nan's old kitchen

## On Eriskay

On Eriskay I watch the tide rise  
and pull in the olive gold tangle  
to hang and cling upon the rocks to harvest

My friend Pony stares at me  
stares at the sea  
a wild mane parted by a drawn in quarter gale

Fires burn in the crofters cottage  
waiting for the dawn  
to guide the drove  
across yon rippled beach  
thru' deep pooling puddles of receding sea  
North Uist to Vallay  
for winter pasture

And on Eriskay I watch the tide rise again



## **Petrichor**

Misty drizzle shower

Petals fall to ground

Lime's glossy sticky leaves

After the storm

Silence calms the dawn

Warmth of summer rain

## Piddle in The Jar

I just didn'ae wan to go to Southport  
my new itchy light brown tartan keks  
even with half a can of talc  
were abrasive as hell

Much happier would I have been flying  
my new orange kite on the green  
or shimmying up the telegraph pole ... the splinters  
were quite ok  
better still getting a shoulder up  
the two tone indigo lamp post  
for a good dangle and swing

As we passed Goodison Park  
I back swallowed a toffee  
that lodged on the epiglottis  
causing distress and my pallor  
to turn Everton blue whilst choking to death  
I knew this day out was not going to end well

Still ... turned and hung upside down  
suspended and back pummelled like a beaten carpet  
I finally ejected the barley sugar projectile  
whilst the passerby thought I was being duffed up for  
supporting LFC

I just wished I was in our den  
behind the greenhouse with Erica  
playing swapsies  
and you'd show me yours if I showed you mine

Somehow ... it was always the same  
that ... parking in Southport would be bad ... very bad  
always .... never a free place on the sea front  
even the promise of chips mixed with gritty sand  
blown in off the dunes was little compensation

I just wished I was back home  
playing in goal against Johnny Dee's team  
and losing 10 - 0 would be better  
than what happened next

It was that last bottle of Corona cream soda  
... after the chips that did it  
it was only a forty minute drive home  
... no need to stop  
but that was a lotta pop  
and it was looking like the emergency jam jar  
in the glove box

I just knew this was going to end in disgrace  
after expelling almost a full jar  
in a pale Irn Bruish shade  
the twisted lid on the jar wouldn't quite fit  
*"never mind chuck it out of the window"*  
liquid launched into the wind I did  
only Nan wasn't quick enough to wind up her glass  
aperture  
and that breeze in Scottie Road caught my  
airborne pee flow  
like a high Mersey tide sweeping back in  
to wash and whack her full in the face

I just wished I was doing something else  
right then ... anything else but that  
evening drive back from Southport  
clutching my empty piddle jar

## Rebel in The Classroom

We had one lesson in religion a week with Mr. Gobowen

“El Gobbo”

who still wore his black drapey gown

His choice of instrument

for any dissent

a slightly warped well used ruler

because a cane looked like his walking stick

and he was old

This weeks task was to spend twenty minutes

with our dog eared unruly unruled notebooks

drawing God

HB pencils shushing and shading

and occasionally ...

dropping onto the parquet floor

rolling away to Gobbo’s stern looks

One by one we had to stand and explain our creations  
there were a few Charlton Heston portraits  
but wasn't he Moses!?  
faces in the clouds (I had thought about that one)  
angels and harps and heavenly bodies

Then it was my turn  
remembering past beaten knuckles and palms  
a completely blank page  
I displayed  
with Gobbo flexing his ruler for the ready  
*"but sir ... no-one has seen our God  
... he's invisible ... isn't he"*  
and while the class hummed approval  
Gobbo flustered hot and bothered was stuck for words  
and his ruler used for rebels was slammed back in his  
drawer

## Haiku No 8

Above the valley  
The full moon rises swiftly  
Releasing its light



## Remembrance

I sit on a quiet bench almost hidden  
in a tiny city centre park  
thinking about those  
who are setting out on their journeys  
condemned even without their knowledge  
by those who condemn ...  
camouflaged by cowardly acts

Where I sit

I can just hear the rumbling hum of the underground  
an enclosed space  
exploding smoky shrapnel  
forcefully tearing and pulling flesh from broken bodies  
a final agony in the darkness

It's time to get going

and let someone else rest awhile  
bringing their lunch hour picnic  
escaping a stressful morning in the office or shopping

the new city wildflower garden is in full bloom

whispering ... bobbing in the breeze filtering up from

the Mersey

## Revelation

Amid the rocks and ruins  
and tumbled Tudor beams  
the remains today stand vacant  
perched cliff top by the sea

Collapsing arching cloisters  
ancient aisles of stones  
from eroding grassless ground  
revealing ragged saintly bones

## **Setting of The Sun**

Sometimes at the setting of the sun

I am reminded of a far off time of bombs and guns  
and the fallen

across the water

in a wilder greener land

## **Sherbet Lemons**

Your old mum was always telling me true stories from her past or things that she'd come across:

*"I always remember a little girl but not her name  
quiet she was in our school  
shared her sherbet lemons  
with little Billy who was always being bullied in the  
playground"*

*"Did you hear about that teenage girl in Tesco's  
we always thought she were a tearaway  
but last week she helped an old aged pensioner  
after her bag was snatched in the car park  
and made sure she got home safely"*

*"Did you read in the Echo about that young woman  
who runs the local food bank and soup kitchen  
collecting goods from all over the city  
out in all weather, windswept and worn"*

*"Did you catch the news on the telly last night  
that brave lady who survived that terrible train accident  
only to crawl back inside through the choking smoke  
to rescue a child from the blazing carriage"*

I remember well

that afternoon at Seaview Lodge Nursing Home  
when I arrived just a few minutes after your mum Pat  
passed away

the warden said:

*"Strange thing lad  
a good looking lass  
came to visit your auntie this afternoon  
and was holding her hand at the end  
I thought that was nice but do you know  
... I never seen her before"*

On the way out I glanced at the visitors book in the  
sunny glass porch  
and gently flicking aside a sherbet lemon wrapper  
revealed a blue smudgy squiggle  
that looked like a Mary

*Sherbert Lemons* was commissioned by Liverpool's Metropolitan Cathedral for  
filming and broadcast as part of a series of Lenten reflections in 2021.

## Siege of Ladybrand

There was a green hill far away  
that didn't have a name  
defended by just six score men  
within a failing old stockade

Surrounded by three thousand Boars  
the Orange State and Transvaal war  
canon's fire pounding down  
machine guns mowing good men down

Five days to wait for help to come  
the garrison held hanging on  
defying odds the Worcesters won  
the Siege of Ladybrand



## **Silence Sees The Dawn**

No sound is needed  
for the forest to grow  
flowers to bloom  
clouds to roam

The hush of the heavens and silver stars echo silence  
in silence we breathe and refresh the soul  
in silence is peace

## Haiku No 9

Water enters creek  
White waves jettison on sand  
Spent tide retreating

## **Singing Kite Flyers of Kelantan**

At daybreak a shimmering hazy light as gauze  
filters through the casuarina trees  
carrying a warm sea breeze  
floating in off the South China Sea

The rice harvest is now gathered and done  
and the kites are readied to be flown

The crescent moon butterflies launched  
swiftly ascend in the late afternoon draft  
zig zagging across the pale blue sky  
to whistle ... hover and sing  
an overture for the twilight fireflies darting at the  
waters edge  
the kites hypnotic hum making old men young again

## Skimming Stones off Barricane Beach

It's mid winter  
and a strange grey calm  
has descended on the cove  
the steel blue sea  
once restless has subsided  
to gentle even ripples

The old man of the sea  
is resting on a flat rock  
with his rusty wiry terrier  
watching and waiting to tell me a tale or two

*"I thought we were being invaded  
in 1944  
at dawn  
the roar of the waves washing in teams and tanks  
gunfire and smoke  
from the bay next door  
all because we looked a bit like Omaha "*

The shells on the beach today are cowries  
ocean spirits washed ashore by the gulf steam  
from far away mystical depths of the Indies

The old man of the sea  
in deep thought sheds a tiny crystal tear  
or maybe its the slightly icy breeze  
that has fallen upon us  
making his pet shiver among the shale

Out of his waxed jacket pocket  
he takes a brass cartridge found here  
all those years ago beneath these sands of time  
and passes it to me as an act of immortality  
keep it polished is his only request  
before challenging me to a round of  
skimming stones off Barricane Beach  
a battle he knows he will win

## Statues

Beatles at the Pier Head

look for the hidden bits they're easy to miss ... many do

Paul clutching Linda's camera

George's belt etched in Sanskrit

Ringo's heel has a number eight ... his birthplace L8 ...

you'll be down on your knees to find that one ... I mean  
the eight

John is holding two acorns to plant for peace

Somebody once made four hats for our four boys

some said they was a bit daft ... the hats

pennies for Paul

sun for George

yellow sub for Ringo

red megaphone hollering help for John

but they was ok ... the hats ...

till they blew away in a gale

Our Cilla in Mathew Street

outside the Cavern

outside the cloakroom

where she asked the customers to step inside

don't miss those hits

look close

she's wearing them

Billy Fury at the Albert Dock

beside the sea ... beside the old tug boat wharf

where our lad were a deck hand

on those towing boats

at eventide from behind

he's yo yo ing the sun down

from this ... his wondrous place

Catching a train ... or not then catch Doddy

waving you off ... or not with that tickle stick

at Lime Street

even if the day is a little grey

bringing a little sunshine and happiness into lives

Stanley Street ... you will have to wonder off  
the main lanes to find her sitting lonely on a bench  
Eleanor Rigby with her shopping bag taking a rest  
a tiny sparrow looking for a scrap of food keeps her  
company  
with one eye on her milk bottle

Then back to the top of or is the bottom of Mathew Street  
again!

John on his own quietly on the corner if there's no busker  
but look up to see the four lads who shook the world  
just imagine



## Sweaty Balls

My sporting moments weren't good  
although scoring two goals at Birkett Juniors  
in a 3-2 win was a taste of success  
but nobody could hold a candle to Bobby Clare and  
Johnny Dee

Playing in goal for 5 a side 'cos I was the only one brave  
enough  
to dive  
and slide  
on ash veldt  
but in the annual sports day relay  
first place  
and a blue certificate presented at morning assembly  
probably ranks highly

Always last in line at rounders and wacking the ball  
high over the trees into the Mersey made me hero for an  
afternoon at Vaughn Road Juniors

A double decker corporation bus hired each week  
to the Guinea Gap Baths in Seacombe  
sharing double decked changing booths  
boys above the girls  
full of cock and bull or ball tales  
and if you weren't sharing a cubicle with Kevin you  
was safe from his bell ringing exercises  
and his unusual curiosity for those of us who were  
snipped at the tip

"Olly" always won our "ollies" each playtime  
as he always used his glass eye as a marble  
and nobody wanted to win that  
as the whistle sounded break ended  
shiny ball cleaned with a bit of quick spit  
popped back into the gaping hole from whence it came

A fractured spine  
in nineteen sixty nine  
at Quarry Mount Middle  
that bloody vaulting horse and hard rubber mat  
put pay to most exertion on the field and gym  
a grand excuse for the rest of school years  
to avoid contact with smelly clammy boys bodies in the  
sports hall

Half a day each week  
the sport pacifist exemptions from P.E. were forced into  
social work ... social care  
shopping for the elderly and tending to their gardens  
half the time they weren't in so we bunked off home  
half the time they plied us with whiskey and buns  
so all in all much better fun  
than cross country and muddy rugby  
with even bigger balls

Badminton ... too exerting and all those high nets  
table tennis ... now I found my sport  
at the local youth club  
but my advice would be  
when you are championship material  
never ... ever volunteer to go ping ponging with the  
girls  
Jane pinned me 19 - 1 down  
as a fair crowd gathered round  
hoping to delight in my defeat  
to turnaround as the comeback kid  
I did  
twenty straight points  
with my drenched swinging rubber bat  
and and those slippery sweaty balls

## Tales From The Riverbank

A stretched midsummer day in Cambridge  
resting under the shady waterside aspen trees  
when a yell and shout  
all about  
a man in distress  
a man in shantung and banded boater  
punting his girl  
hung just too long onto his pole  
made a dashing splash into and under  
the cooling waters of the Cam

Thrashing and lashing  
making azure waves in the rivers flow  
my brother kicks off his canvas espadrilles  
and dives in bravely ... but then he knows these waters  
opposite his Gonville and Caius

While he is courageously rescuing the suited suitor  
surrounded by blue flashing lights and blankets  
I gently coax in his shivering and shocked Guinevere  
with tussled hazel tresses  
and gossamer white frock  
backlit through the wispy willows  
whom I gallantly land  
grasping finger tips to hands  
she delicately and shakily faints into my arms

## **The Arrow of Time**

Next door to the clock repairer

inside the old antique shop

the old man sleeps in the window

no one has ever woken him from slumber

## Haiku No 10

Petals are open  
The garden is now perfumed  
How sweet is the scent



## The Day I Met up with Dee Dee Ramone

That late autumn morning  
when we met on an Essex village green  
a private publicity session away from the crazy crowds  
that you were used to here  
... clean ... to help or put right  
those fallen to the fruits of poppy fields

Your slight suspicion of gain and others motives  
was put to rest when I said

*"I was there man at your Cavern gig Liverpool in 77  
that was the best show ever that year"*

emotively triggering the memory you embraced me  
bass hands clasped tightly  
not wanting to let go  
as we held that memory and the smell of leather  
just for that moment  
we shared a joint passion  
for a lost time ... a past time  
when you and I were young

Sadly you would succumb just once more  
to opium ... to the high trails above  
and leave this world in Hollywood  
to rest in the shade of trees  
lying beside other legends  
lipstick on the black marble and a fans red rose

Sometimes

from time to time  
when I saunter down Mathew Street  
or stumble across a quiet village green  
I can still hear the echos of Rockaway Beach

## The Man Who Traded Whisky For A Toke

Please please pass the pipe  
I'll trade you whisky for a toke  
as starlight falls to earth  
the band strikes up a note

Gentle warm and west breeze  
over the hills and far away  
through the sweet resin haze  
the songs remain the same

Around our campfire sitting  
Cheyenne lighting up his smoke  
please please pass the pipe  
and share your totem toke

Peace, love, rock and roll  
drift away and float  
thru the night on to dawn  
I traded whisky for a toke

## **The Most Respected and Greatest British Public Figure of all Time According to Marc Price**

Really this was all Ratty Rathbury's fault  
our master of R.E.  
well master of one ... himself really

Due to a general lack of interest  
in his one weekly period of forty minutes  
it was decided unilaterally to hold a debate  
"Who was or is the greatest British public figure of all  
time"  
okay the 20th Century would suffice as our knowledge  
and enthusiasm for history matched that of R.E.

David Glory ... backed by his baratheia brigade  
nominated Winston Churchill ... a dead cert to win  
fully approved by Ratty his number one fan

After no-one else volunteered to do  
or name any other candidate  
Marc Price clutching his weekly edition of "Disc"  
belted out "*Marc Bolan ... sir*"  
to the dismay and disdain of Ratty Rathbury  
*"you rabble go away and debate's in one weeks time"*

Friday afternoon thus came around  
thirty students gathering ... listening to  
the impassioned speech about Winnie  
how the war was won  
how we wouldn't be here now if it wasn't for ... etc etc  
Ratty was most pleased  
cheatingly allowing extra time for this plea

After the great applause and hurrah's ....  
mainly from them baratheas boys  
Marc Price clenching tightly  
this weeks new copy of "Disc"  
unfolded its large free double page colour poster of  
one half of T.Rex sitting in that wildflower meadow

caressing his Les Paul ... the orange one  
cool !

then presenting without a word  
hitting the large white clunky switch  
on my borrowed Hitachi cassette player  
*"Ride a White Swan"* emanated from the front  
of Ratty's desk

brilliant ... nobody could or would complain  
it was only two minutes long

Ratty grudgingly gave thanks  
for this unconventional performance of a debate  
then opened the floor to vote  
saying in thwart

I thought  
that he was clearly voting for Churchill  
adding his to 14 other raised appendages  
he was hoping for miscalculated abstentions  
but Mr Bolan achieved 15

Ratty was reluctantly about to return a tie  
but had seemed to forgotten or ignored my waving  
hand  
alone but albeit held high sitting on the raised  
mezzanine

Glaring red faced at me he shouted  
*“right laddie you better have thought long and hard and  
sensibly ...  
this will decide it all ... tell us who”*  
to which I blurted out *“Telegram Sam sir”*

And so it came to pass that Marc Bolan  
is and or was  
the greatest most respected British public figure ... ever  
according to Marc Price and just maybe my raised hand  
in the gallery

## Haiku No 11

Where the swings where  
Wildflowers blossom and flourish  
Colouring summer



## **The Night Elvis Played Our Town**

The real Elvis is coming to the Grand Hotel next week  
a secret stopover gig  
just like when the Beatles played our Tivoli by the tower  
its only a rumour ... a buzz and appears it may be true  
as he is due  
to pass thru

Friday night and all the guys and girls in white capes  
and gold chains  
are flapping and rattling and sweating  
in the hot Mersey wind  
waiting in line

Its crammed inside and the ultra violet lights  
make those flares, cloaks and gruns  
glow like an atomic explosion

The noise and screams subside as someone important comes on stage to announce

*“He’s here, he’s arrived, he’s in the building and live on stage right now”*

the spotlight bounces a beam of the acoustic jumbo and wham ... the opening strums of

*“Watching the Detectives”*

## The Shadiest Lane in Lucca

I tend to avoid the white glarey squares  
in Lucca's merciless midday sun  
discovering the shadiest ways always run north to  
south  
cobblestones worn and smooth  
where eastern walls are often damp and cool  
with the faint scented aura of earth and oak moss

Still ... a little cafe coffee shop does just fine  
on a quiet corner and a breath of breeze  
in Piazza San Frediano  
or Baluardo San Colombano  
in its shadow of garden trees  
off the Via Della Rosa ...  
a saintly place to rest awhile for something light

I struggle with siestas  
thinking I'll always miss the best of the afternoon  
but generally by 3.00pm succumb  
as shutters roll down  
and sleepy yellow cellophane sheets  
are placed in haphazard fashion  
over old goods in the windows

Later at dusk I spy a mature gentleman  
in his glossy blue silk suit  
heading to another shady place  
navigating narrow lanes  
exclusive and elusive  
looking for the Coquelicot light in a passage way

## **The Squeezy Bottle that Landed on The Moon**

The summer of 69

a long hot season of rockets

it was all Lizzy Broadbent's idea

best teacher we had at Birkett's

Liverpool was running an Apollo competition

and the best stuff would go on show to the public

everyone got stuck in with the wet gooey newsprint  
papermache

balloons and planets

or egg cartons for grey craters

I wanted monsters and flying saucers and a Fireball XL5

but our Miss Broadbent who was really a Mrs

put in her stiletto's and dashed my early ideas

The magic moment came in our scullery

standing solitary on the avocado green window sill tiles

a perfect specimen ... in black, white, yellow and red

the ones that's kind to hands and rich and thick to  
lighten the load ... our squeezy bottle spelt with one "e"

Stanley knife plus checkered sticky tape

bit of Gloy and Kellogg's cardboard fins and a cone

piloted by Matt Silver ... no that's the paint

if Miss Broadbent was impressed she wasn't giving  
much away

The planet crammed round the telly

trying to watch the suspicious black and white landing

with a lot of tin foil flapping and tripod things

still ... we had a school outing later that week

to Liverpool Museums Outer Space display

Lights down low ... the colour of twilight

in the centre of the gallery a glass dome spotlit

my squeezy bottle standing erect on the moon

better than that rickety contraption

a quarter of a million miles away

## **This Mythical Land of Legends**

As early evening came upon us slowly  
and the orange sun made the city golden  
we set off on a journey

From a station beneath the stars we set forth  
as the fingers on the clock completed a full circle and  
then just a little more  
to a priory town we travelled  
heading for a hamlet we set sail

The castle on the cliffs was drowned by the night  
we slept as we rode upon mythical white horses  
galloping towards the awakening dawn

At last we saw a new coast  
soon shall we be landed in this foreign port  
and from floating through the dark night hours  
continue to glide on wheels of steel

Deep into the heart of this new continent  
following a river .. so long .. so deep .. so blue  
to the centre of the world  
surrounded by seven mountains  
protected by medieval dragons  
whose ferocity had been quelled by ages past

A window revealed a spread of enchanted valley  
where grapes on the vine grow in a thousand rows  
and when the sun went down  
we watched the tiny lights in the distance  
flicker and fade into the moonlight

On quiet days we would walk amid pine forests  
pierced with silken rays of light  
and as the mists came upon us the world swirled  
in clouds of mercury silvered rain



To the cities adventure of bridges and spires  
mastered to perfection over centuries gone by  
a breeze whispers through our locks and curls  
and jet black hair  
and a golden barge bathes stealthy and the creatures  
gather and stare and chirp

This land conquered by love as dreamers love  
water that flows .. twisting .. sparkling as diamonds  
those last embers of the twilight sundown rubies  
like the jewels you shall wear on your finger forever

*This Mythical Land of Legends was a lost poem from 1979/80 recently  
rediscovered in a very old box of envelopes and was published in the 2021  
autobiography "I Saw Her Standing There"*

## **Twin Sisters**

At Meadowside number nine

behind our fence and vines

throughout the 1960s

our neighbours were rarities

twin sisters

twin spinsters

Agnes fat and scary

Ethel thin and wary

Both past teachers retired

in their garden united

lovely roses with prizes

immaculate and tidy

but woe betide if my ball in their realm resided

Their bulldog Winnie  
white and honey  
wrinkled and ugly  
face pushed through the garden gate  
walking by I really used to hate  
slobbery face thrust and howl  
or a grumpy angry growl  
enough to loosen my nervous bowel

Still ... one day Aggie and Ethel  
invited us round (I thought to tell me off politely)  
about putting my balls in their flowerbeds  
but no ... instead  
best china tea cups with cakes, buns and scones

When they disappeared into the scullery  
I inquisitively spied a trinkety thing  
catching the bright sun's rays  
and was drawn to a small silver framed faded  
photograph  
on display in their parlour

I guiltily grabbed the glinting gilt edge  
and was stealing a look  
when the twins returned  
and I knocked it over  
trying to manoeuvre it back on the mantelpiece

Skinny Ethel asked me to retrieve it  
and bring it to her  
she started to cry  
and this was all my fault ... again!

Agnes speaking softly explained ...  
that was Raymond, Ethel's betrothed  
taken a couple of days before he set sail  
in 1912 on the Titanic

I then noticed the bottom left hand corner of the frame  
was rusty  
from fifty five years of salty tear drops  
and I placed the fiancé among our fancies on the table

I promised them

there and then ... to keep my balls under control

they were not so scary after all

and all that Winnie needed was a good pat

## Vanished

From 1895 to 1915 Nancy my Nan's mum had four  
sisters and four brothers  
to swell, swill and sweep the mills of cotton town

In truth I only knew Harry who was really a Henry  
but he was the closest ... chubbiest and liked a corona  
... cream soda

Harry rocked Rommel at Al Alamein  
racing them desert tanks  
in sweltering blistering Egyptian heat  
the intrepid bravery of one flurry earned him the Silver  
Oak Leaf

a commendation from the King  
till life returned to normal switching from tanks  
to buses hurtling round Preston  
with his clippie hanging on to the rails for dear life  
between the ping pings of the string bell

Lawrence was lost in the Great War  
a weak wispy cripple without warrant or need  
sent to fight for a different Kings Shilling  
the pain putting Nancy into an early grave

Annie what a rebel ...

what a girl

after giving birth to an illicit affair

left behind the baby ... my sort of uncle George

and skimming down the drainpipe

disappeared into the dark night

never to be seen again ... ever!

Nan and Harry searched in vain for years between the  
wars

Harry was convinced to his dying day

*"Our Annie were murdered by her unknown lover"*

and if they ever drained Preston Dock

*"She'd be there silted away"*

among the barnacles

my best guess

or hope

is that she sailed away from Liverpool

to the Argentine or Montevideo or took a room

just behind the boardwalk on Coney Island



## Waterfront at Liverpool Part II

The neap tide rises  
beneath a new moon  
waiting the days last ferry  
with late commuters  
returning to Woodside

Across the waterfront Canning Dock  
the sounds of the city  
facing the deep obsidian water  
for an instant  
call me  
to their heart  
as the lights across the river  
shimmer silently  
on waves of dreams

## When Lybro Ruled The World

On Lybro Way today  
you'll find a city bungalow or two  
and town houses popping up as new

For on them lanes and rows  
stood the factory  
that turned Liverpool blue  
where Lybro reined before Levi's grew

Industrial garments ... clothes for the tropics  
overalls and denim with stud rivet pockets

Staff in the fifties and sixties  
taking a break or a lunchtime pint or two  
at the Bears Paw in refrain  
across the road from All Saints  
and then all at once again  
fab fame came

Nordi John ... black amber and pale sunlight  
contrasting cuffs

Ringo slims ... jean scene and mean  
in ice blue mega 4" turn up buffs  
flamenco George splayed and tapered  
pampas Paul snappy tooth check sharp as a razor  
all when Lybro ruled the world

Today all that remains  
on these new streets with the same old names  
are the memories of those  
who worked and played  
and drank at Cains

Mike and his overweight Frenchie Mo  
walking round the block in a figure of eight  
twice a day

Norma nearly ninety  
keeping her patch tidy  
shunting out her purple wheelie bin fortnightly  
every other Wednesday

## **Wild Hearts and Tempests**

Teenagers pelted with stones  
teenagers on patrol  
distant yet so close to home  
to die in a doorway all alone  
all amid the terrible beauty  
strikingly drawn on walls  
and shown to be  
martyrs of wild hearts and tempests

## **You Sure You're Eighteen**

Do you remember your first time ...  
when you went to the movies

Our next door neighbour was a lonely old man

Uncle Sam

he was a Bond fan

everyone who was old and knew our mum and dad  
was called uncle

took me to see Dr. No

and that one about Russian love

at the Essoldo Birkenhead

it wouldn't be allowed today

some old fella taking a kiddy to the flix

with the promise of crisps

and an interval choc ice

cold and nice

he was just sad 'cos he had just lost his wife

A day trip to Morecambe it just poured and poured  
so to the proms picture palace Arcadia we explored  
Nan's excuse to see that Sound of Music one more time!

The ABC Liscard was screening "Barbarella"

a swift enquiry to the ticket seller

*"You're about 8 years too young laddie"*

studying the film poster in the foyer

I made a mental note to fall in love with Jane Fonda

and for my love of films I must learn to lie about my age

... in the future

Seeing Double A's at the ABC

introduced in 1970 (I think)

was easy for our gang "Smidge" "Drako" and "Stonk"

apart from "Tixie"

who looked like a sparrow on lolly ice sticks

still we got our value for a threepenny bit

smuggling him into see spies in "The Mackintosh Man"

Paul Newman and Dominique Sanda

*"You sure you're eighteen"*

*"Yes"*

once you'd cracked that first underage "X"  
casually looking cool ... confident swagger  
well 15 was nearly 18

*"Enter the Dragon"*

fibs became second nature

re-runs of *"Easy Rider"*

super new releases of *"Dirty Harry"*

and *French Connections*

or *"Emmanuelle"* as a wet afternoon matinee

Granny stopped going to the Gaumont

when it became a Unit 4 multiplex

*"Better off watching my cowboy films in my front parlour at home"* she would say

but with those having a desire and screen appetite

four times a week was just about right

when support films could be a surprise delight

or just too long but not the case with *"Straw Dogs"*

I made another mental note  
to fall in love with Susan George

At 15 you can pass for 18 with a touch of fluff above  
ones lips

then there was my special arrangement with Trish on  
the tills

a dead ringer for a young Buffy Sainte Marie

*"You sure you're eighteen"*

*"Yes"*

then you can buy half a pint of Heineken

and give me one ... later ... after the show

I wasn't quite sure who was exploiting who

but the system worked

and going to the pictures seemed a lot more exciting

I think she got just as much enjoyment

of letting me come in

that was Trish on the tills



Between photo shoots

I had nothing to do

what else is there to do on a damp afternoon

but "Alien" at the Odeon next door to the Empire

there was just me and this girl sitting on her own in the  
far corner

within minutes it was scary ... in space no one can hear  
you scream

and to my surprise

she dashed through all those empty rows

to sit next to me

to cling on to me

cinemas are strange places for meeting strangers

and doing strange things in the dark

on a very rainy afternoon

and I really was eighteen

There are two basic things ... I learned  
never drink two pints of Old Peculiar just before seeing  
"The Deer Hunter"  
at the Futurist in Lime Street and sit in the centre  
you will have to clamber over sober patrons well before  
the interval  
it was 185 minutes long  
oh ... and sitting on the front row at the ABC  
Shaftesbury Avenue  
"Apocalypse Now" was better than any other three  
hour trip I had ever been on  
dizzy for days after ... just dizzy ... so maybe that's  
three things then!

Hanging out in Leicester Square on a stuffy spring  
evening  
crowds gathering punks and skins awaiting The Clash  
"Rude Boy" world premiering at the Prince Charles  
taking refuge up a dark alley a lone rear fire door  
propped open

to let in some fresh air  
just a peek maybe and a corridor  
leading to the bogs for a leak  
man ... I was in for free ... lucky boy  
confidently cool entering the dense packed smoky  
melee  
squeezing into a back corner seat  
ready for a revolution rock  
police and thieves and London burning ... we all did in  
that auditorium of heat  
the night we all fought the law

Just for a while I lived a few minutes walk from the Art  
Deco Rio  
in Hackney's Kingsland Road  
well known  
for all nighters and euro art screenings  
a good bit of Bertolucci "Novo Cento" Parts I & II  
the midnight interval (it was five hours long that film)

our lovely box office girl had the kettle on for instant  
with baked trays of cakes ... you know the homemade  
ones wink and a nudge  
and a pound slipped into a plastic cup  
cannabis never tasted so good

Today its the Silver Screen Club for those of a certain  
age

Liverpool One

Odeon

BOGOF admissions ... free Costa and bottomless  
bickie's

Whilst queuing for "Downton" behind a lad in front  
seeking something more mature

after all them years I heard those words

*"You sure you're eighteen"*

*"Yes"*

then standing at the payment booth

with red and purple streaked long grey hair

under the ceiling spotlight

a dead ringer for an ageing Buffy Sainte Marie  
pinned to her breast pocket a name badge bright silver  
on black  
sparkly reflecting a “Trish”  
as I resisted the temptation  
to order half a pint of Heineken  
and see her for something special after the show

## Zephyrs

Going forth are the 83rd and 20th  
rolling out the wires from the sodden soggy drum  
the sulphuric fog hangs over barren wastelands  
undulating mud and mush of Polygon Wood  
and distant sound of guns  
the cruel heart of the Passchendaele slaughter

Arriving by train at Ypres  
we felt forlorn over those fallen  
and lost souls  
bleach white tombstones  
like bones left in the sun  
dazzle us in their descent of rows

Sappers built tracks and laid traps  
to blast and kill the forward foe  
to clear mine paths and lay down some more death  
as both sides caught  
tangled and torn targets

on barbed wire gallowed poles  
hanging over shell ... hell holes  
a hiding place safe no more  
the fear frozen face of the corpse  
cradled in the crater at Cambrai  
still clutching the impaled broken bayonet blade  
exposed and twisted  
blood drained from the gaping open chest

So many names so many graves  
as the town hall clock chimes three  
in remembrance of another sweeter place  
another country  
and hallowed green pleasant meadows by the Cam

One final push to Mons  
but the night ignites to a thunderflash and crash  
the corral was hit  
and its a dirty job to clear and bury the equine dead  
in an old trench to kill the stench of death  
haunted drawn fizzogs face the dawn

the finality of war is in sight just one more month ...  
maybe  
there sitting in the branches of the sole charcoaled oak  
the devil cackles surveying his odorous hades domain  
pointing with sharp dark wizened finger claws  
claiming this as his land  
where once a lush green forest stood  
abandoned to a burnt landscape of dirt, disease, smoke  
and drained men

A child runs up to us with a tin box  
of his treasures and bits found  
in a recent fallowed furrowed field  
*"spent detonators"* he tells us  
as he allows me to make a rummage  
brass shrapnel ... melted ... deformed ... abstract  
a khaki pocket of sorts  
holding what looks like a part of fossilised leather glove  
it was a charred phalanx ... a human relic of a trigger  
finger



It's mid summer and the sun is still high above the  
glistening clouds  
and the buglers sound the Last Post from within the  
Menin Gate  
eerily resonating off the names resurrected each day to  
eternal remembrance  
in foreign fields  
the men who fought and fell for peace

The dusk tide zephyrs  
cause me to stir and turn  
into the sunseting afterglow  
and facing the remains of the day  
take the next departing train away

## Zig Zag Road

I thought I could live in Zig Zag Road

I thought I might fall in love

with the girl on the bus

then find a flat off Zig Zag Road

But then there was Cherry

my muse and model always ready

to share her sweet white wine

it was nineteen seventy nine

to make bohemian love

in her bohemian boudoir

just around the corner

from Zig Zag Road

I still saw Julie on the bus

most days

and we got close

very close

for a while anyways

These days

I take the occasional walk

down Zig Zag Road

with memories

of being in love

## *Epilogue*

*Have you ever had one of those days  
When nothing goes the way you planned it?  
Fate takes you down a different road  
When you look in the mirror  
It's another face that looks out at you  
You forget everything you've been told  
I frighten myself when I see what's inside of me  
The parallel lives leave me mystified  
Did I ask the right questions?  
Did I get the right the right answers?  
Am I living the right life inside?  
Like living out part of a dream  
When you never really know for certain  
What is real and what is not  
And no matter how much you believe  
That the day you end is the day you started  
You can never be sure of what you've got*

*(Judie Tzuke: "Parallel Lives")*

## About The Cover Design

Jan Kalinski's studio is in Kent's leafy lanes. In 1992 Jan was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) resulting in permanent numbness of his fingers. He can no longer hold a fine pencil or write his own name but will not let go of a paintbrush.

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and would like to know more about**

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I thought I might fall in love  
with the girl on the bus  
then find a flat off Zig Zag Road  
I still take the occasional walk  
down Zig Zag Road  
with those memories  
of being in love

And as for “Zig Zag Road” ... you  
will meander there in the end ...  
and yes it really does exist and it  
is a road I have travelled and  
walked a thousand times or more.  
My road is close to the River  
Mersey, New Brighton, where I  
grew up but I guess we all have  
our own winding lanes that can  
lead us to often unexpected  
places.



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