

THE LONG ROAD

The Long Road is a Staffordshire Libraries collaborative poetry project by members of several Staffordshire poetry and writers' groups – Rising Brook Writers, groups at Eccleshall, Baswich and Great Wyrley libraries, Drake Hall Prison and the Quest Poetry Group.

The members of the groups were asked to contribute four line verses that would be assembled into a large work - a journey from departure to arrival. The verses represent many different voices with their own style, the passing thoughts of a wide variety of travellers.

Thanks to everyone who contributed.

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LEAVING

Choking on the air I breathe
Skies like graveyards
Nothing but the scent of blood
On the walls of every alley

*The land pale with dust
Decaying in slow motion
Windows like eyes, shattered
Splintering wood*

**This is a dead town
Dead and decaying
Crumbling like powdered bones
Graffiti splashed like the spatter of blood, like warnings**

I am preparing to leave
This cursed world behind
Stained as it is
Even I seem almost clean

*The stench of this place
Is clinging to my clothes
And I am trying to outrun it
But it follows me still.*

*And I am leaving these ghosts
Locked in their closet
And their chill fingers
Will never touch me again*

**The ROAD runs from your door step
Beware, or you'll get swept away.
There's no putting off that first step,
Move on. Get out there today!**

Life is for living
I love to explore
I love feeling happy
When I walk out the door

*It's a long road that has no turning,
Best foot forward, bridges burning
No backward glance, no secret yearning,
The future's bright, a new day dawning.*

**The door it stands wide open
The open road I see
I stand upon the threshold
Of adventures beckoning me**

**The first step is the hardest
The second's slow but strong
The third is taken jauntily
The fourth is light and long.**

**I'm sorry I have to go now
The bell is ringing clear
I've left behind my best friend
And folk that I hold dear.**

We have to pack the cases
And lock up my front door
I'm quiet now, the time has come
I can't say any more....

*I do not need a purpose
To step beyond the door,
Just the call of brand new pastures
Where I've never stepped before*

***The garden gate clicks shut behind my back
The first step begins the trip, over my shoulder a sack
A few miles on, this marks my furthest from home spot
Deep breath shoulders back, here I come ready or not***

I put my feet into my shoes
To start a journey I can't lose
Into the future never looking back
My past I've exhaled, what's to come in my sack.

And I am itching to go
From all the people I know
And I am running so fast
To get away from the past

ON THE ROAD

*Places we pass
People we knew
Memories in our mind
Remembering the good times*

**The road is long and winding
People everywhere seem so confused
Some mining. Lying. Grinding
So much trauma, cruelty and abuse.**

This road's too straight, too long, too
Boring, boring, boring.
Give me some bends, some curves, some
Interest, interest, interest.

*The road to heaven is life long.
Temptation along its path. Strong.
Get it wrong, and you're caught.
The road to hell. Is short*

**The road itself, tarmac or mud, does not really matter,
It's who you're with and what is said, in other words the patter,
Not just of feet but chatter, natter, companionable silence
That make the journey well worth while, a memorable occurrence.**

My road is long and straight it seems
I surely don't know why
It features nightly in my dreams
As the little road-runner speeds by

*I like to travel lightly
Just the clothes upon my back
I'm sure to find a haven
For anything I lack.*

*I do not need big signposts
Whether north or south they say
I'll travel where my feet go
They will know the way*

*I hear the distant laughter
Of others on the road
Such company is welcome
To lighten heavy loads*

**There's a road less travelled so they say,
running pell-mell down-hill all the way,
marred by many a twist and turn,
trodden by those who'll flash and burn.**

Time heals they tell you when you cry.
Don't believe them! It's a big fat lie.
Grief lurks, bides its time then pounces,
Shreds your soul into grams and ounces.

*They never tell you when you're dressed all up in white,
what life's really going to be like the day after tonight.
They never hand out the Women's Aid hotline number
- sommat t' do wi' 'putting asunder' – shouldn't wonder!*

**Problems on the way of life are well renowned I'm sure,
Along the road a tap or rap on everybody's door,
The pleasant freewheel down the hill preceded by the climb
Mind numbing struggles to be topped by the clear-cut view sublime.**

I really am quite taken
With everything I see
I really had no notion
Of the beauty that's in me

Travelling east in darkness
Waiting for the sun
I lift my head in wonder
That a new day has begun.

*Time heals they tell you when you cry.
Don't believe them! It's a big fat lie.
Grief lurks, bides its time then pounces,
Shreds your soul into grams and ounces.*

**It will be OK! Nasal announcer will announce, display will display
But I always prepare too soon... coat, case, bag, key
Lurch to the doors overanxiously.
Will I make it? Which platform will it be?**

Tripping over pot holes
Stumbling wearily
I'd like to know precisely
What this journey holds for me.

My life is like a journey
I wish I'd no begun
Until I'd put my hat on
To shade me from the sun

I'd like to follow closely
And seek the things you seek
But I must take a new path
For we are all unique.

*He walked the hot and dusty road
He carried his cross that sorry load
He stumbled and fell along the way
He suffered for us that long long day*

**The long road of life has a bright beginning
The bends along the way show signs of sinning
The happiness is chased by darkening
shadows
The ending is sadness with no hope of tomorrows**

Freedom sings in my veins
I sit behind my eyelids
Traffic flashing by
Boredom's teeth click like clocks chime

Licking at my fingers
These flames
Voices in the darkness
Crackling like anticipation

*The road of love I'm needing to travel
To go back home to love and laughter
To be happy again with the ones that matter
The ones that I miss and long to kiss.*

*The road of love I'm needing to travel
To be happy again with the ones that matter
The ones that I miss and long to kiss.
And I do so long to go back home.*

**I am a lonely traveller
And that's the way I'll stay
The people clutter up my route
You there, get out my way!**

**I have lingered far too long
My wanderlust is spent
"Go home, go home" my spirit cries
"The years will not relent."**

**I am a static point
Surrounded by a blur of traffic
I am an endless journey just beginning
As the world flashes by**

Bent double shoulders to the screaming winds we tramped
Each snub-nosed boot in turn nudged forward through the mud
Yet blistered feet no rest nor longed for respite found
Save victory's bitter taste in sacrificial cud

**“The end's in sight!” our leader pipes,
“Link hands with me, let's sing.”
In harlequin-spun thread we climb
Take flight on thermal ring**

*The road stretches out like an eternity
As the clouds of boredom gather
The Scenery flashes by, inconsequential
As I wait for my destination*

*Nerves are gnawing at my stomach
Boredom would be better than this
The endless fear choking me
The hint of freedom when I see the sky*

*Traffic blurred against my windows
Boredom creeping up my spine
The itch of freedom in my fingertips
My veins are on fire*

**The road is long and winding
Which is very unoriginal of it
It stretches like a sky
Eternity in my eyes**

The road is long and winding
Like a bad lie
I can taste its dust
Burning like a tired sun

*The road is long and winding
And metaphorical
And we are at the beginning
Unless we're at the end*

**Winding towards the pale sky, like a crumpled ribbon
The sunlight running over our faces like liquid gold, sublime
We travel at our own speed, tasting the miles before us
The shadows refuge from the sun's rage**

Winding, he had called it.
Sublime, I had said, taking refuge in cliché.
We had crept along, defying the speeding cars who passed us
We had miles to go, and all the time in the world

*I am a slow-moving figure
On the horizon
The night follows me
Like a train dragging by my feet*

PLACES

Places we pass
People we knew
Memories in our mind
Remembering the good times

*Silver seas have passed my eyes
Red and orange and purple skies
Reflective memories cast down stream
Moving weightless across new scenes*

**The compass spins and starts to stop
I take my time to dodge raindrops
A broken glass path made from fallen stars
Lightning illuminates the dark.**

I walk my mother's paths
With her I cry and laugh
She accompanies me with her scenes
Of unreal beauty spread across seven seas.

*Peat Galway black onto a bleached white sand
Marram-grass pulls north as we squeeze the land
Kite-swirlers grasp against cumulus skies
Clean cobalt blue; clears famine from our eyes.*

**Streets upon streets
Equally identical
Red-brick, roof tiles, double-glazed white window frames,
Everything echoes with the sound of lost laughter**

As I walked past the window
I had a little grin
I hoped someone would open the door
And give me a glass of gin.

*Now I am reaching for Heaven
Stretching my bones
Angels will surround me
Or fire tainted with regret*

**Driving along the twisting turns
Scenery passing, endless trees and ferns
Straight road freedom at last
Foot down lean back world flashing by I'm travlin fast**

A sinking fiery sphere radiating furnace rays for all it's worth
Spreading liquid laver, meandering over the undulating earth
Slowly shadows lengthen, quenching the rivers flowing gold
Finally darkness blankets the solidified surface now icy cold

*Rocky Rhodes rode rodeo racers
Rocky rode road races
Rocky rowed rough reefs
Rhocky Rhodes rode, rode roads, rowed reaching Rhodes*

**Farm shop the sign leaps out to greet
Purveyors of the finest quality meat
Glimpses of livestock lined up so very neat
Flashes of liquid orbs of lambs unknowing and sweet**

"Any jobs goin mate?" Fystus enquired (hoping for a no)
"Well only one but it's a three year contract on the go"
Fystus mumbled ok (for he was broke) hungry enough eat a whole cannibal
"Take this bucket and spade to clear the road of dung follow behind General Hannibal"

*The snail has always
Wherever she roam
Got a gaffe
She can call home*

**For no reason
On the ramble
He dived into
The surrounding bramble**

As a change from Blackpool
For a trip
Daddy took them to the Gaza strip

*From Tokyo to Kyoto
Is an expensive trip
Why not save up money
By living in a skip*

**This fairy road with it's spitting glitter
This tinted car with its leather seats
This shaky hand moving to baroque melodies
This white lined night stretched before us**

He joined the army to shoot away the memory of her
Travelling the whole wide world
He went AWOL in Amsterdam to dance with a man
It's funny how the story unfurls

*There are many interesting facts about this place
Their faces drop eyebrows raise, headphone volume up a pace
The flow of traffic tide takes them out of it at last
Next town 30 miles off eyes close to block all that nature stuff leaping past*

**Pale, washed-out in the sunlight,
Everything bright
Red brick warm to the touch,
Grey streets curl away into the distance**

The soft edges of the old oak tree
Sway in the summer breeze.
The gnarled branches, trunk like elephant skin,
Stand solid, solid as a rock.

*Birds nesting in the hedgerow.
Rabbits burrowing at its root.
Queen Ann's lace in abundance.
Old stone jar half hidden in the ditch*

**Saturday night dance, everyone's there.
Girls in high heels, boys combing their hair.
Shivers down my back bone, played the local band.
Tonight will I fall in love or be a one night stand.**

Follow the path of the Romans, of chariots and men
The Jarrow march on parliament returning home again
Countless highway travellers, many a heavy load
The A1 out of London, the mighty "Great North Road"

*Before they built the motorway, before the railway track
The way to York, the minster, the only right way back
The road across the border to the Edinburgh tattoo
The main road to the north my friend, the A1 is for you*

**Sunlight filtered through the branches
Arching over the road.
September's breath on summer leaves
Turned the tunnel to gold.**

Hedgerow & fences, sheep and a cow,
Chaffinch & fledglings on twigs and a bough.
Farmer on tractor driving down lane,
Dog running after them, turning again.

*How many roads have been taken, how many bridges crossed,
How many stones have been stepped on, how many paths lost,
How many rocks have been clung to, how many mountains climbed,
How many trees have been cut down, how many sunsets denied.*

**The bluebell wood is full up.
The trees have grown taller, their branches longer.
The sweet, spring green leaves of the trees
Shade the rich dark brown of the ground.**

Photographs of relatives, who lived long ago.
I can see them, they cannot see me.
So many questions I want to ask them.
Silent photographs of relatives who lived long ago.

Traces of an abandoned cottage
Relics half buried in the ground.
Garden gate, now part of the hedgerow.
Sand lane, now turned to stone.

Ghosts of young men marching
Their eyes straight ahead their heads held high.
They have said goodbye to their wives and girlfriends
Sharing thoughts of home and a safe return.

*Moonlight on the disused coach road.
Dark trees swaying in the wind.
Distant church bells chime the hour.
Man in shadow prepares his shot.*

**The road before me rises steep
The wind is at my back
To lift my steps lest they should fail
And stumble from the track.**

**The autumn hedge is berry-bright
With hop and haw and bramble
And sloes to pick to spice the drink
Of those who love to ramble.**

Is this the way I remember?
In the woods does it turn to the west?
I catch red sun through the leaves.
The smell of sausages over the fire.

*Stop here and rest yourself a while,
Look round, enjoy the view.
There is no need to hurry on –
The road will wait for you.*

**The road is long and time is short,
I simply cannot stay.
I've already lingered far too long –
I must be on my way**

To stop at the café
And have a little drink
To collect all my thoughts
And have a good think

I like to spoil myself
That's what I do
Coz if I don't, no-one else
Will think of you

*As I walk down the winding road
The night seems to be getting long
I'm getting strong but some times
This isn't where I belong.*

*As I am leaving this big lonely place
A big smile shall stay on my face,
Never again will I return
A good life I will learn.*

*Behind these gates and the iron bars
As it turns night I look up at the stars
Twinkling in the beautiful night sky
I shall watch them until the day I die.*

**Bus, taxi, train, I use them all to people watch and wonder
Where people go and what they do when their journey's over.
Perhaps like me it's just routine, visiting friends or shopping
But why is it when I look at them, their lives seem more exciting.**

*Clickety clack, clickety clack
Weaves the train through landscapes along the track
Some picturesque, some reflecting despair
A glimpse of nameless faces whose lives I'll never share.*

I am away from Home,
A long way.
Moonshine here. Sunshine there.
I grieve for England in Spring.

**You are a stranger on an empty road
You are a footprint in the dust
Such beauty and such grace
Amidst the violence of your face**

*He slept in our car last night
Hazy shadows hung over us like blankets
The rush of traffic our lullaby
As our eyes waited for morning*

You turn up like a motif,
Like a warning sign
You are the lingering taste of freedom
You are every star in the sky

**This life, this highway. A perilous rubbled road,
Forty years a burden of work on our shoulders, like Larkin's toad.
Loves lost, true love found, friendly faces go underground and bosses to
impress
Retirement and summer gardens, old age, infirmity.....nothingness.**

*A whistle blew, a train took you away my love
A whistle blew, you arrived in a foreign field.
A whistle blew, you went over the top.
A whistle blew, your heart stopped, my love.*

Oftimes I chose new paths to tread.
Then beguiled by horizons new,
It took me some time to understand
That myself came right along too.

**Going my way I met a man,
Many miles we shared together.
Now time and miles and man have passed
Yet his wisdom's with me ever!**

*My journey's not delivered
The goods that I've been sold
So I stumble ever onwards
Now a wraith upon the road*

The promise of the sunrise
Has delivered a thousandfold,
I've stepped into your shadow
And shelter in your hold.

*The moon lit my way when I was in the dark
My heart was lifted by the song of a lark
& tears helped moisten my dry cracked skin
Outside was war but I felt peace within.*

**I could use a guide to show me which of these roads to take
I would like a friend who would be there for friendship's sake,
I lift me up from darkness I want to feel delight,
I need to see the path while my lantern is showing no light.**

Cars clog the way to Eccleshall,
Where Celt and Saxon strode,
Bishops hunted, stage coaches ran,
Two thousand years of road.

ARRIVAL

Walking the old familiar road, worn soles make little sound,
I think myself Odysseus, returning after so many years.
What of my Penelope, or Argus, my faithful hound?
The door flies open, dog leaping, she, smiling through joyful tears.

*The sun nibbled at the clouds
The blossom all pink and white
Drifted into the path of Spring
And I'm coming home.*

**I see a warming fire glow through rain & wind & sleet
Looking forward to the warmth of the people that I meet,
My legs are truly aching, my nose is running too,
Yet by that fire sits a friend, just waiting with a brew.**

The tug of wind
The gleam of sky
Till hand in hand we meet, glorious on mountaintops
Cheeks stung by the wind

*I've took off my jacket
And put down my bag
My legs are aching.
Grab me a fag.*

*I sit on my chair
It's good to sit down
A knock on my door
My friends come around*

*They come to see me
They come for a chat
It's nice to listen
To this and that*

*Then off they go
It's time for bed
Things whirling round
Inside my head*

**I've travelled many roads in life
Some brought me happiness, others strife
But the path that led to Drake Hall
Is the hardest one of all.**

I started out quite lightly
To seek what life could bring
But I stumbled by the wayside,
And packed the whole thing in

*A paradise bathed golden in light
A nightmare I have now forgotten
As I wake to this
Beautiful morning*