

ELVIS IN LIVERPOOL
BY JIM BENNETT



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Elvis in Liverpool

In 1977 when he died
Elvis came to Liverpool
he was on his way to somewhere else
I don't know why but I know he came
perhaps it was just something he needed to do
I saw him walking along Church Street in the afternoon
turning up his high collar
against the Mersey breeze
later I caught sight of him in St Georges Hall
gazing at the mosaic floor
then I saw him at the Pier Head
heard him singing "Ferry Cross the Mersey"
to himself

a parade led by Elvis started late in the afternoon

it wound its way from the Pier Head
up past the Albert Dock
along Upper Parliament Street
past Gambia Terrace
and at a vantage point he stood for a while
looked down across the City rooftops
and listened to the bricks
that taught the 60's how to rock
then along Hope Street
past two cathedrals and back down into the town

more people joined the crowds that followed him

and all the while Elvis
sang quietly to himself
someone said later they heard him singing
"You'll never walk alone"
as he walked back down to the river
where he went out along the dockside
at the place the Isle of Man boat used to stop
climbed down a wooden ladder
then stepped out onto the water
he stood on the water for a little while
getting his balance
then he walked off across the River
towards the setting sun

the words of his last song
"In my Liverpool Home"
drifting back on the wind

Fingerprints of Elvis

when a man
holds the world
in his hands
sooner or later
you will find
his fingerprints
everywhere

Collecting

a man I met
said he shook the hand
of someone
who shook the hand
of a person who kissed
the hand of a Pope
another person he met
shook hands with Diana
he knew guys who knew or met
the familiar faces
traipsed across the TV
as celebrities
soap stars known
by their characters names
pop stars remembered
for a single hit
or the super stars
that glitter across
footnotes of history

he collects them all
recalls the clasp
that joins him to them
notes it in his diary
another and another
he tells me how
he shook the hand of a man
who had shaken Tom Jones' hand
and Tom was friends with Elvis
Elvis shook hands with presidents
the man had pictures
to prove it

that is how it works
he said
we make secret connections
to those we touch
here another picture
he had shaken the hand of his MP
who had shaken the hand of
Saddam Hussein
the ultimate chain letter
connecting everyone
a homeopathic handshake
diluted till only its
memory remains
written down
collated
kept
and noted
in his diary

Remembering Elvis

I knew a man who had a motorbike accident
not the one who died that was a different person
his story ends abruptly
this man survived but his memory did not
each day a doctor would come to his hospital bedside
ask questions like "Who is the minister of transport."
and because he could not answer he was told
that he was not able to go home
one day the question was "Who is Elvis?"
the man said "The Minister of Transport?"
he was removed to the psychiatric ward the same day

the doctor who asked the question
was a long time Elvis fan
would not accept that he was dead
thought Elvis had rigged it
to get away from his fans
(or that aliens had taken him)
thought anyone who did not know who Elvis is
was mad and should be incarcerated
it would be no good saying
he was a rock and roll singer
or he was in films
or spent time in the army
the only answer he would accept was
Elvis is the King of Rock and Roll
or something that meant the same

someone told the man who had the accident
how to answer the question
a few weeks later when the doctor visited
and asked "Who is Elvis?"
the man smiled and said "He is the king"
he was released within an hour
in gratitude he went to Buckingham Palace
to thank Elvis
but Elvis was not there
someone standing in the street outside said
"Elvis has left the building."

Trout fishing on the Mersey

it is hard to explain how people get connected to Liverpool
hard to understand
but it is a character I came to know
someone I grew up with
played with
photographed
drew
it's mum and dad
it speaks funny
but its like when you hear it
everyone else in the world speaks
in the strange accents
and this is the right one
it walked out of Africa with Lucy
set itself up on the banks of the Mersey
where everyone came to find inspiration
said it was a great place
they told everyone else and they came
and some time in the past the world
moved here for a while
trout fishing on the Mersey

it inspired everyone
people everywhere could name streets and people
who lived on the shores
that would be about the time
The Pope came and we went trout fishing
listening to Klezmer music
and Dylan and the Beatles
on our portable tape machine
happy days
trout fishing in the Mersey
listening to Liverpool
breathing long and deep
snoring as it dreamt its future
its spires touching heaven

it is hard to explain how people get connected to Liverpool
but they do

Mathew Street

I often walk down Mathew Street
looking for writing on the walls
it's supposed to say "Billy Blake is fab"
but I could never find it
except in a poem

it's missing
should be there
to show the affection
Adrian Henri had
for William Blake
but it's more than that

when Ginsberg came to Liverpool
Ade took him to see
the cast-iron Church in Everton

as they came out
into the Liverpool sunlight
the street sign on the road
read "Albion Street"

they talked about Blake
spirituality poetry
they knew it was an omen

Adrian Henri wrote a poem
"Mrs Albion You've Got a Lovely Daughter"
dedicated it to Allen Ginsberg
and he became famous

Allen Ginsberg went off
found himself being spiritual in India
then carried on being famous

and today a shed load of people
walk down Mathew Street
which is incredibly famous
at least one of them still looking for
"Billy Blake is fab."
written on the wall
by someone other than himself
and I'm still not able to find it

There's a little bit of Elvis in us all

I admired Elvis's effect on women
the way his hair quiffed perfectly
his rich deep voice
sense of humour
generosity
and the way he filled his trousers

although short
he didn't look it
was well proportioned
had a temper
was a bit awkward sometimes
could eat enough to burst
and had some dubious friends

his choice of manager
showed a lack of judgement
his trust; a naiveté
bordering on innocence
often talked to himself
and his dead twin brother
loved his mother
his house his country

you can criticise his movies
or his fashion sense
and it was serious bad luck
to die on the toilet
eating a burger

but he was the king
just that
the greatest rock and roll artist
the world had ever known
raised high on a pedestal
far above the rest
apart from Cliff Richard

I guess
we forgive him everything
smile when we hear him
forget the lost years
the drugs
Las Vegas
forgive him everything
because
in the end
there's a little bit of Elvis
in us all

Memphis on the Mersey
(for Jerry Goldman who helps keep the memory alive)

billowing white gold from
southern fields
gathered to the sound
of the delta blues
bales on a Liverpool dockside;
skeins loosened by billhooks
fly like flags
from the dock wall

from the Mississippi
to the Mersey
ships that carried cotton
brought the sounds of Memphis;
first the Blues
a deep echo rumble of pain
that claws at you
then Rock and Roll
made you feel
you could touch the sky
until finally the voice of Elvis
took you there and back again
filled you up
then left you empty
gasping for more

we heard it here
in Liverpool first
rocked before the rest of Britain
sailors played records
traded them
others brought them home
mementoes from a mythic place
we listened

began to scrape radio dials
catch distant faded echoes
played scratched discs
on radiograms
picked at cheap guitars

56 -7 -8 -9-60 – 61
it boiled away
until the Mersey Sound
exploded from cellars
to flood across the world

from Beale Street to Matthew Street
Memphis on the Mersey
where two cities
rock
to the same beat

as cool as the sound of jazz

it's late, gig over, I should be on my way home
I suppose I can convince myself that I am
but the roads are mysterious and the night air
is as cool as the sound of jazz
drifting from a basement club in Basin Street
the car takes me down roads to see where they go
some place I know but different
shadows like a sheet
change familiar shapes into strangers
ghosts of friends
here the sound is the rhythm of tyres
clipping on the edge of concrete road slabs
another time it will be the slap slap slap of windshield wiper
and another the distant sound Dave Brubeck
on the CD player
volume turned down low
and maybe some words will come and I can speak them like a song
to the slap slap slap slap slap slap of the tyres
or maybe not
but it must be time to find some familiar place
time to find my way home
out of the seductive never ending streets
away from the music
away from the cool air
away from the comfort of night
back to the room where the sound is imprisoned by walls
swallowed by carpets and curtains
back to the place where tomorrow
demands to be organised
back to the place where darkness is trapped
and night holds its secrets behind a closed door
where dreams wait
but just for now the road is empty
yellow street lamp lit
traffic lights all on green
the car window open brings in the scent of early autumn
and for now just for now
life is as cool as the sound of jazz

Tonight I'm older

each night I come
to conduct the course
bring my notes
sat read them
in the empty classroom
as I listen to my thoughts
echo off the walls

each night I take the bus
find my way
to a brown curled
poster of a holiday
wonder about
the smiles on the beach
wondered why
I am older than Elvis
ever got to be

every day
I visit the freezer centre
at Iceland
put my head in a fridge
to cool off
as I look for
food for one
that I might like

I stop when my hair
gets brittle
or my nose and chest hurt
from breathing
freezing air

and each night I stand here
look up to the stars
wonder when
they will come

I saw Elvis on stage once
cloak spread
waiting to fly
to be lifted up by
the wind from five thousand
hands clapping
now each night
I am a little older than Elvis
ever go to be

Elvis in the Cinema

Elvis sat in the third row
of the cinema
singing along to the
songs on screen
where a giant Elvis
curled his lip
be quiet
the audience yelled
we paid good money
to see this movie
a short time later
the manager threw him out
too many complaints
he said
they came to see the movie
not to listen to you

Elvis in The Willows

I saw Elvis striding
purposefully
through Liscard
smiling at people
who recognized him
as he made his way
to the Willows
he went in
sat at the table
in a booth at the back
by the corridor

watched him
order coffee
sit alone drinking it
still smiling as people
caught sight of him

saw him
chatting to the owner Steve
who wanted to get
his picture taken with him
but couldn't find a camera
soon a small crowd gathered
Elvis left
still smiling at people

the Willows is still open
though it
changed name slightly
after Steve died
the table at the back
in the booth
by the corridor is still there
his coffee cup
cold and half empty
still on the table
but Elvis never came back
to finish it

