

Transcript for

Love, Liverpool: an A-Z of Hope - Letter 1: On our way to Liverpool

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This audio recording features the voices of seven people. Actor **Chloe**, who reads Mandy's story **as Mandy & as Train Guard**. Then **Dan Thompson & Freya Hannan-Mills** who read their own public submissions. We are then joined by writer **Frank Cottrell Boyce** for a break in our stories & tells us about his favourite memory of the theatres. We then go back to our public submissions with stories from **Julie Cutler** first and then **Sam Batley**. We end with actor **Jodie McNee**.

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Chloe as Mandy: A love letter to Merseyrail by Mandy Redvers-Rowe,

[Music begins, a slow instrumental]

My darling Merseyrail. I can't tell you how much I miss you, miss being with you. Traveling with you.

It has been so many days, weeks, now since we were last together.

Do you remember the last time?

Do you?

[Scoffs]

Why would you? I mean, you have so many people to keep track of. But don't worry because I remember it, perfectly.

It was a Thursday in March, the 12th

or perhaps the 19th

It was when I went to Liverpool for that meeting. I got the 12:53. Or did I miss that one and get the 01:08?

Anyway, it was the afternoon. What I'm trying to say is that even though I can't be with you, I think of you alot.

All the time. Well, most days. Especially now we're in lockdown.

Locked down, locked in.

At home, only out once a day for exercise. But, it's for the best. You do understand that, don't you? You see, I can't be with you. Your spaces are too confined, inside the carriages. Others will be sharing. My air will breathe.

Their hidden germs upon me, contaminate me. So, painful though it is. I have to stay away.

But I know you're still there. Know that you haven't deserted me. For I hear your *[train honk]* every morning as you glide into the station.

[Music builds faster]

Sometimes as I lie in bed, I imagine what it would be like to go on a journey with you.

The sort of trip I used to do every day.

In my mind, I harness up Sally. Walk down our small driveway and across the road. We turned left, then right onto Albion street.

I walked quickly because as usual, and I've cut it fine, and worried I'll be late.

When we reach Atherton Street, I turned left, walk down the hill, across Victoria Road and reach New Brighton Station.

I've arrived.

As we walk onto the platform, the guard is chatting to the driver. They see Sally and me.

Chloe as Train Guard: *[in a Scouse accent]* Iya love, you okay gettin' on the train?

Chloe as Mandy: Sally locates the open door and we jumped into the carriage. Sally first. Me next. We like to show off.

Sally finds me my favorite seat. It's the one by the guards door facing it, so I'm going backwards. With the window on my right.

I hear the electronic announcement listing all the stops that we'll be calling at.

Then that little bleep, bleep, bleep *[the beeping of closing train doors]*, as the door shuts *[train door shuts]*

We're off

Sally settles at my feet, the window is open and I'm a little cold, so I stand up and slam it shut. The loud speakers fizzles into action.

Chloe as Train Guard: *[over the train tannoy]* Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

This is the 08:53 Merseyrail train to Liverpool, calling at Wallasey Grove Road, Wallasey Village, Birkenhead North, Birkenhead Park, Conway Park, Hamilton Square, James Street, Moorfields, Lime Street and Liverpool Central.

We're travelling at approximately 60 miles per hour and the weather is shite...

I mean, terrible. So aren't you glad you're inside?

Chloe as Mandy: Everyone's listening now. You don't normally get this much patter. It's like he's auditioning for EasyJet. Or perhaps the Everyman.

Chloe as Train Guard: *[over the train tannoy]* Anyways, my name is Blake and I'm your guard today. I'd like to say I'll be coming round with hot drinks and snacks. But I can't... because we don't have any!

Chloe as Mandy: Laughter ripples along the carriage.

Chloe as Train Guard: *[over the train tannoy]* But have your tickets ready, cause I'll be having a look at them. Thanks for listening and thanks for travelling with us today.

Chloe as Mandy: We arrive at Wallasey Grove Road. It's the stop Ella, our oldest daughter, used to get off at when she was at St.Mary's School. If I caught the earlier train, tonnes of school kids would pile off here.

The doors shut and we were off again. I love the way you rattle along. I suppose the new trains that are due to replace you will be smoother, but I don't mind the noises you make.

They're sort of comforting. Some people are chatting further down the carriage and I can hear someone's muted music through their headphone.

The guard comes out and shouts,

Chloe as Train Guard: tickets and passes please.

Chloe as Mandy: I get my pass out and open it up.

Chloe as Train Guard: Ah, what a boss dog.

Chloe as Mandy: He strokes Sally who wags her tail happily. He then moves down the train. We begin to slow down as we come into Wallasey Village. A young woman with a push chair sits down on the seat across the aisle, and I'm reminded of Debbie.

Debbie was my first New Brighton friend and we'd met here on this train. She was traveling with her youngest daughter still in her push chair, and we just got talking. We talk all the way. I loved it. Two mums chatting

And then when I had Faye, Debbie ran up to me in the school playground and gave me a present and I invited her around for coffee.

Debbie was my first local mate, the first person I could pop around and see. She died in 2009 from breast cancer. I still think of her, especially when I'm sitting here.

You remember Debbie, don't you?

Yes, of course you do.

We slowly pull into Birkenhead North. This is where people change from Moreton, Meols, Hoylake and West Kirby. This is where Faye used to get off when she went to school in West Kirby.

I love West Kirby. When the girls were small, we'd often do a day out there hauling picnic bags, bikes and balls off the train, clambering over the bridge to the other platform to wait for the connecting train.

Now the girls are older. David and I sometimes do the Wirral coastal walk from New Brighton to West Kirby, which takes us most of the day. After rewarding ourselves with chips from Marigold. We get the train home. Getting on at this stop for the final leg of our journey.

But lots of people get on here. Because there's a great free car park at the station. It is, however, a pretty rundown area.

One night when traveling home from a day's work in London, some lads threw a can of beer at me. Furious, I stood up, said "Do you mind?" Then. Realising how ridiculous, how middle class, I must've sounded, sat back down. About five minutes later, one of the lads came over and began to talk to me.

One by one the others followed. By the time we got here, which was their stop. We were all chatting. At least one of them was off his head on glue or something, and the others had all been drinking. But they were small boys underneath it all. The youngest, I reckon only 12. I'd felt so sorry for them.

What chance did any of them have? How come they were out on their own? Where were their loving, caring parents.

Birkenhead Park, the last stop before we go into the tunnel and where I used to have to get off as part of my coping strategy when pregnant with Ella. Gosh, that was a long time ago. I was big. We're talking late term seven months or so.

I'd get on the train, sit and immediately feel sort of tight, restricted, claustrophobic. I'd start to overheat and get really hot and sweat, be unable to breathe. I'd panic. I have to find my way off and stand on the platform and...

...breathe. *[She inhales]* Breathe. Breathe.

Then get on the next train, seven or so minutes later and hope to make it to work.

When Ella was 14 and Faye 8, I had a summer job. Which meant we all had to get off here every day. Remember? I was part of a production of Shakespeares, The Winter's Tale. The girls had to come with me to rehearsals as it was their holidays, and they were too small to be left at home.

I'd felt so guilty about that. Each day dragging them here with a picnic bag, pens, pencils, and drawing books. But I needn't have worried, for the huge community of actors, welcomed them into their midst, and they had the most fantastic time. It felt as though Birkenhead Park herself weaved her natural magic upon us all.

As for the production. It rained most of the summer, but dried in time for the performances. Which were huge success. We all remember it is one of the best summers we ever had.

[Train in a tunnel]

We charge into the tunnel. The sound changes, becomes louder as you power downwards. I think this is the part of the journey I like best of all

[computer tannoy announcement] Conway Park is the stop for Birkenhead Town Centre, the Europa Pool and the View Cinema. This is your most recent station opened in 1998. It's a long way down. There are ninety nine steps if you choose to walk up instead of using the lift...

That's a lot of steps.

We take off again and then stop at Hamilton Square. A beautifully elegant Square, with Georgian buildings. It's the last stop on the Wirral side. The last stop before we go under the Mersey.

[Underwater sound effects] Now under the river, sometimes when we're travelling through this part of the tunnel, I imagine the massive tidal river above. In places, it's more than three miles wide, but at this point between Birkenhead and Liverpool, it's less than a mile.

All of that water moving slowly over our heads, just 30 feet or so up.

Amazing.

[train horn in distance] Then you toot your horn as we come into James Street, the guard announces,

Chloe as Train Guard: *[over the train tannoy]* Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Liverpool.

Chloe as Mandy: We're here. You have made it, but I'm not surprised. I've travelled with you so often over the years, taking you for granted.

I, accompanied by my darling dogs first, Emma, then Crystal, Emily, Abby. And now Sally, have all known you. They've guided me on and off your trains, have all known intimately the routes to the lifts, the barriers and ticket offices.

I've loved that freedom, independence, and you're so reliable. So constant, so close to my home. Aesthetically, I don't think you'd win any prizes. You're not as sleek as the Japanese bullet train, or as impressive as the two and three story trains of Australia and Europe. But you do have charm, a battered sort of charm, a Liverpool friendly charm.

Yes, there is definitely something about you.

Love, real love isn't dependent on looks anyway. Especially not in my case. Real love is something else, based on trust, built up over time. Made up of a complexity of feelings, reflecting what has been given and what is given in return. The memory of events, both high and low.

Laughter. Tears.

Little gifts of life. Packaged in time. Thank you for the gifts of memory you have given me. I will come back to you. I don't know when we're going to get out of this, but we will.

And yes, I'm scared. I don't know how I'll cope with so many restrictions on touch, touch being my way of seeing, navigating. Don't know how I'll be able to socially distance when I can't see those around me.

Don't know how that will work.

But I do know when the time comes, you'll be there as ever.

Ready to open your doors and let me on board. Ready to whisk me away, fast track me into town.

So, this is not a note to say goodbye, but a promise to say, I'll be back soon. Love, Mandy.

-end-

-A new story begins-

Dan Thompson:

[Slow music begins & the sound of waves fade in]

Hello? It's me. I'm sorry. I've been so quiet for the while. Things just got so busy. I lose track of what's important. I'm sorry. I hope you don't mind too much.

I'm by the docks overlooking the Mersey and I'm here looking out at the water. Does something for the way my heart works.

I'm stood here...reflection in the water more times I can count. It's still here tonight. Quite too. I thought there'd be more people around, but I must have just missed them.

It's just you and me here. There's something about being at the edge of a river like this, isn't there? Being here it's hard not to think this is it, all that matters and all that is. On the edge of everything.

It feels like the river caused me. I wonder if you know why I mean. Bits of the same for you. Things are ok, for now. Everyone's fine, nothing really changes.

I'm tired, but I think you already knew that.

That's why I came down here actually. Being here, it feels like it resets me. It's as if I haven't ...muscles tight and not...deep. But being here, it eases them. Maybe it's the sea air. Maybe it's time and space just to be here and think. I don't know. It just does. I don't know what I'd do without it.

It's impossible to underestimate how important this place is.

Without it, the city wouldn't be here, not in the same way... our voices, our identity. All of it is because of where we are and how the river shaped us. We have it so much. It's in our veins, the way we do things. We feel it's current and it's pull. We belong to it.

Spoke to dad the other day, told me about how I used to swim here, in the Mersey, I didn't believe him. He was insistent though and sincere. In a way I couldn't ignore it felt like one of those folks tales, that was passed down, handed from one person to the next with things like dates or specific shedding away until you have what's left.

Couldn't see why anyone would want to swim here. I'd heard how ferocious it was, heard about the currents too. How they're tricky to navigate, difficult in boats, let alone when it's just you in the water.

But then he told me why, and I began to understand. It must've been hard back then. Jobs weren't easy to find. You'd been all over the world, after being a stroke in the engine rooms of ships going to places like Australia...coming back here though wasn't much around.

...three months, somewhere down South, chopping trees to survive. I guess that was the most important thing really, surviving. Dad said the...competitive for money, can't image the strength of freezing waters as it swirls around your body seizing up muscles sending you one way or another, making you do a dance.

No water of its own devising, it sounds like an ordeal for potentially no reward. But I guess the water was a way of keeping on. It takes a lot to do what you did, with special kinds I really hope we share that, I don't know if you won or managed to ended up wounded.

Dad swam the river too, but that was different. It was off the shore of New Ferry. It's childlike. Care free. Different to what you did, but possible because of you Grandad. Sounds like he lived a life worth knowing. I'm sorry, I didn't know if.... I never asked really, but I could tell from when I was born, your life was an echo, and I was only vaguely aware.

I'm sorry I never thought to ask. The way I know you now, is the way others knew you. To meet you at a patchwork of voices and memories has shaped my impression of you. From what I do now, I'm proud to be your grandson. I'm glad our river offered you a chance to keep going. Coming here. It's a way of remembering you.

It feels like you're here. I know at some point, I'll leave the city and the water. I don't know where I'll go, or when, but it will happen. Someday, I'll be far away from here, from the place I remember you. But it's always going to be a part of me. I know my heart will always belong to the sway of the Mersey. But I want to see the world, just like you did. I'll be a shadow to your own footsteps.

That reassures me, how great a place is far away and I will come to know you. Well, it's said and done now. The Mersey will be the only river I want to look out at.

- end-

- A new story begins-

Freya Hannan-Mills:

[Waves chashing & seagulls swark, we're at sea]

Crossing over...

My mother huddled here, on this weather battered ferry.

Collar up in plastic, clammy skinned.

Drips teetering on mascaraed lashes.

Knees warmed with sodden paper wrappers, swaddling chips, smothered in gravy.

Together we pressed, sharing warmth and battered bits.

This - this is where we came. Sitting together we mapped a future traced an arc in damp skies.

And if anywhere should hold our soul, would it not be where we most deposited our dreams?

With vacuum flaked and sweetened cocoa. Chip butties. Fish flaking. Battered, yielding, golden coated. Rain sodden as we were crossing over.

-end-

-We're joined by Frank Cottrell Boyce-

Frank Cottrell Boyce:

[Night sounds, crickets & owls]

Hi, I'm Frank Cottrell Boyce. I'm pretending to be on holiday by sleeping in a tent in my back garden, and I've been asked to share for a picnic a happy Everyman memory. And I've got lots of Everyman & Playhouse memories. All quite cheerful, but the most important one for me was way back when I was at school in September, I joined the youth theatre and I was full of swagger and self confidence and I went with a boy from my class called Steven Sims, and there was a man in charge of the youth theatre, I think his name was John Witchley.

Um, I said I was, I declared myself a writer, so he let me write the Christmas show, which was a version of beauty and the beast. But, you know, very arty. I'd seen photographs of the John Cocteau film. I hadn't actually seen the movie, and I wrote it, and it was bloody terrible. And he had a read through like a proper play.

And it was obvious at the read through that it was bloody terrible. And I had to work really hard to make it good. And that doesn't sound like a happy memory, but it was the making of me. Because until then I've been sort of strutting around and full of cockiness and that was the first time I got introduced to the discipline of getting it right and the fear of that you are going to end up in front of an audience. So the youth theatre made it possible for me to be answerable to an audience and to have the rupture of listening to them laugh in the right places and the horror of watching things not land.

What an opportunity that was to be produced and to work on a production when you were in, I think it must've been about 15/16 amazing, amazing experience.

And the boy who came with me that day was Steven Sims, who became an actor at the RSC and is now a professor at Birmingham. So, not a kind of jolly puppets and ice cream memory of a great night out, a memory of being introduced to the discipline of getting it right and a gratitude for that fantastic opportunity that I, and lots of other people like me who joined the youth theatre, for a lark, really mostly just to gain permission to go into town at night, um, when we were too young to go to Eric's or whatever, um, to belong to a feeling of being part of something and to be part of a cohort that went on and did interesting things. So, um. It's really a big thank you to the Everyman Youth Theatre of, um, long, long ago.

I'm going to go back in my tent. Thank you Everyman.

[Opens & closes zip on a tent]

-end-

-We start our stories again-

Julie Cutler: Hi, my name is Julie Cutler, and this is my poem, and it's called Through Their Eyes.

Through their eyes. My city has come alive, the parts that should never have died, but did like a wallpaper that's been up for a while, gets unnoticed. But through their eyes, I can find new delight in Liverbirds poised for flight and the Mersey Ferry set sail.

A street of hope, which is what they deserve, joins two Christian churches who still welcomed their prayer, because they pray for better times. As do we. So it's my joy to play them. A Beatles reframe for the very first time to hear Penny Lane and to visit the places that the song alludes to and feel the warmth of every person who welcomes them. And in turn, gets to view, the city through their eyes, our own Liverpool.

-ends-

-A new story begins-

Sam Batley:

[A beat]

I could see you, but you couldn't see me. Through the veneer of coach glass anonymity. Sibling love isn't so easily defeated. We laughed. Then you cried waving goodbye blindly to the soundtrack of diesel engine. Lurch, I felt tears too, dry eyes, sweaty palm, restless, empty. Sea in anxiety, a one way ticket and a bag for life.

Yeah. Come on quick. Four days prior to the admittance, I'm sick. Ed popped and whisper, shout itself will fail me and off I went. Eyes full with cumulative dread, a blue rope to base. No note left in the place. I knew so well. Yorkshire's field. I love your smell and through air, helpless. Oh, just a lost boy. Can't speak, choked, vibrate in phone.

Not now. Please vibrate in phone. I'm on my knees. Answer. The other end, it was a lie in dark, a voice of reason when all was stark, I need help and I need it bad. I need help and I need it bad. Surrendering to the fact that my way weren't workin' the solution given was Liverpool, get your send to Liverpool.

I'll come. The sun were on my left side, closed. I'd ed rest legs too long to fit, feeling nervous, feeling sick, or what's on the other end of this journey is uncertain, but it's better than what's behind.

Your next stop is Liverpool One. I remembered about being an Island, too much time spent, landlocked, dashed by goals and salt.

I've arrived, mate, sound lad, be there in 10. Hugged from a scouce heart and taken to where I've make my bed. Unfamiliar streets, unfamiliar tones, guided by faith for the first time, and I didn't feel so alone. A lot of firsts for the first day. Speaking openly of addiction, and how my life had decayed. A shell. Nausea.

Yes. I'll have a tea mate, no sugars, and I get greeted with words, not forgotten. Welcome home lad. Welcome home. Fight or flight, and I'm not flying anywhere I've landed, I'll do what's suggested in this strange atmosphere. When your 'ead knows you're onto it, it recoils in fear back to factory settings. A rabbit in 'ead light. Attend these meetings and it will put you at ease. Too, right.

I'm Sam, and I'm an alcoholic. It doesn't fit in my mouth, but my mouth isn't speaking, and it's time for the gut. Too tired achin'. And I learned honesty and I stripped bare no old bars in this long lost love affair. The enemies within two sides of the same coin teased out by Liverpudlian wisdom and an hours full of joy.

You speak and I listen, born new under different conditions. 17 Rodney Street, you expose me within your walls. I lay out all on the Holy not to land on deaf ears. Self-belief shattered over years and bit by bit. I come alive just for today. I'll be worthwhile inspired by you, Liverpool, your back kitchen quirks, your solidarity when it 'urts. Confidence in the face of defeat.

Three graces, Liverbirds, see tonight I do the things I never could. I do the things I never thought I should. In your galleries and in your streets, in your theatres, cafes and parks. Their ebbing tide of the Merseys art. I'm under your spell, Liverpool, your beauty blinds me. Scousers my friends, your spirits inside me.

I'm dyed in the wool, dyed in the wool . I wear it with pride lad. Dyed in the wool.

-end of stories-

Jodie McNee:

Thank you for listening to Love, Liverpool: an A-Z of Hope. I'm Jodie McNee, and I'm an actor. I was in a production of Twelfth Night at the Liverpool Everyman. I played Viola in that production, and it was actually the first play to open the new brilliant, amazing, fabulous building, that is the Liverpool Everyman.

And it was one of them once in a lifetime experience. Full of joy, full of spirit, full of love from the community, from Liverpool, full of support. Every single night the

audiences were just like THERE with us and I'll never, ever forget it. And if you are in a position to please consider donating to the Everyman & Playhouse theatres, if you go on their website everymanplayhouse.com you'll be able to donate there. And that will help support our actors, our artists, help the theatres to keep making extraordinary, inspiring work and keep entertaining us. Um, and also help the theatre to keep doing their work in the community and with our young people.

Thank you so much. Take care. Stay safe.

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We hope this transcript was useful. If you do have any feedback we'd more than welcome it. Please email communications@everymanplayhouse.com.

Thank you.