

## Transcript for

# Love, Liverpool: an A-Z of Hope - Letter 5: Scouse Exceptionalism

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This audio recording features the voices of eight people. Actor **Aron Julius**, who reads their own story, commissioned by the Everyman & Playhouse theatres. Then **Richie Billing**, **Samantha Roberts**, **Beth Easton**, **Katharine Wright**, **Joseph Turner** and **Angela Simms** who read their own public submissions. We end with a message of support from actor **Leanne Best**.

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- our first story begins -

**Aron Julius:** Dear Livermore Court, a hidden gem, the jewel on top of Toxteth's crown. This is a thank you note.

[Street noise]

I've always raised an eyebrow when people say they're scared of Toxteth, at least once a week in school they'd say, "*I'm scared to go to Toxteth.*", and every time I'd say, "*Don't be, I'm from Toxteth.*", as if that was all the justification they needed.

[End of street noise]

But, to an 11 year old, saying that an aspiring actor who could sing and love to play chess with his granddad on a Saturday was from Toxteth, was pretty good rationale. What did I know? I was only a kid. Plus, scared? Scousers and fear don't mix. That's just a fact. Everybody knows that. So what are they scared of? I'd think.

[Cinematic music starts]

Home for me, isn't a house. Or where the heart is. It isn't even wherever I lay my hat, by the way, if you haven't already, Marvin Gaye, Wherever I Lay My Hat. Great song. No, home for me is you. A first floor flat, tucked in the heart of Toxteth, just off Lodge Lane. Livermore Court. It's been a while hasn't it. Since I buried my childhood treasures in your grounds. But that doesn't matter because even after relationships, clubs, moving cities, learning how to drive and University, my heart is still with you. And I come back to you now, grownup, with full recognition of what you truly have, are, and give.

You sit in an area rich with history and culture. The Guinness Book of Records holds Liverpool as the capital of pop [an old record plays], with more Scousers hitting number one than any of the town or city. Making us natural chart toppers of course. We've got the greatest variety of historic paintings, specimens, over 80,000 artifacts, from a Titanic life jacket to Ancient Greek magical amulets, in the entire country held at National Museums Liverpool. And we are the most successful footballing city in England. Home to Liverpool FC, Everton FC, Tranmere Rovers, and so many more.

[Football crowd cheers] Our teams have won, 27 League Championships, 12 FA Cups, 6 European Cups, 8 League Cups. 1 UEFA Cup and 1 FIFA Club World Cup.

But, when all is said and done Liverpool's greatness is encapsulated in Toxteth.

[Cinematic music fades out]

[Street noise]

Toxteth, L8 is an area in South Liverpool. It is a bubbling cauldron. A cultural beacon, a diverse cocktail of people filled with communal spirit, solidified through its history, stories, music. And of course it's people. Toxteth has many parts to its history.

It's home to the oldest black immunity in Europe. During slavery, many slaves were brought to and traded on the Liverpool docks [ships and waves in the distance], creating massive financial gain for the city and it's merchants. It's produced powerhouse talents, such as John Archer, the first black Mayor in London, John Conteh, [punches in a boxing ring] the champion boxer who even Muhammad Ali said was *"almost as pretty as I am"*. [a bell dings, end of the round]

[Street noise fades out]

And Dorothy Kuya, one of Liverpool's greatest fighters against racism and racial intolerance. Celebrities, such as Napkin Cole, would flock to Palm Cove nightclub in L8 to experience a taste of true Scouse hospitality. And Toxteth gave the world Willy Russell, writer of 'Our Day Out' and of course, 'Blood Brothers'. Yeah, you're welcome Earth.

[Riot noise, shouting & broken bottles]

But, Toxteth was rocked by massive unemployment in the seventies. And as the economic decline begun, the racial tensions between police and the black community, which had plague toxic for decades, sharply rose, sparking the riots in '81. And after anger, fire, bullets and destruction, Toxteth was left devastated. Culturally, economically, spiritually.

[Riot noise echos out]

But that was years ago, right?

[Hopeful music with street noise]

40 years ago. It's not like that anymore. To us from Toxteth, we have our mojo back. On my way to get my number 3 fade at First Choice Cuts on Lodgey, I got filled with a real sense of optimism. I see fresh faces. I feel the community pulse thumping. I can smell the spices from the local international shop. If I choose, I could take a short five minutes detour and walk to one of three parks.

And of course from the ashes you arose, didn't you Livermore Court. So, what are they scared of? [Hopeful music ends] If Toxteth is the pulse, then you Livermore Court, are the beating heart, you encapsulate everything Toxteth is, and you feed that to the life within your walls. Of course, Lodge Lane assist you. It's valiant and determinant history runs through, bringing new life and depositing the creativity,

passion, and innovation that helps nurture the leaders of tomorrow. [Cinematic music]

So, what are they scared of? To the untrained eye, woolybacks, you are just windows, walls and trees. A mere extension to Lodgey. Nothing particularly special, but when you're born in Liverpool, what they don't tell you is that you inherit a gift from generations past. Scouse vision. An ingrained imagination and curiosity in the face of adversity.

So Livermore Court, you became so much more than just a close of flats. Your trees became safe houses when we needed to escape from the *"time to come in, your tea's ready"* calls. The hallways became noisy extensions of Anfield, taking a four nil batterin' from my yellow flyaway many a time. And the hollow bush sat outside my best friend Joel's house became a sanctuary for young love to blossom from a first kiss. By the way, Naomi, wherever you are, thank you. Just don't tell your brother, Joel. [Cinematic music fades out]

So, what are they scared of? It's me. Isn't it. Not me as an Aron, but my blackness or blackness itself. It's not Toxteth the area they're scared of, or the trees or the shops or the smells. It's the people. 'Til the age of eight, I never felt that being black was anything other than who I was. [Cinematic music]

Is that weird? It wasn't something that I was trying to be. It just was. When a black boy matures into a young black man, we become a threat. All the misconceptions and perceptions of Toxteth or even just what it means to be black from an external point of view are instantly attached to me. I knew that more than ever as I was egged and told to *"get back to Tokey"* as I was running down my Nan's road, clutching my chest set at 11 years old, it was then that I realised what you had done for me, Livermore Court.

This is a thank you note. Remember. Thank you. Thank YOU. You had, have, provided me with a rare opportunity to have a safe space, free from prejudice, ignorance, and hate. A space to have fun, climb trees, have sword fights, wrestling matches and collect snails. Yeah, we really did that. A space to be a child. Before the world got involved. [Cinematic music fades out]

Thank you.

Yours always. Aron Julius.

Ooh, P.S. Livermore Court. Keep doing what you're doing. I'll be back for the treasure I buried when I was six and by treasure, I mean a pen, 50p and a pack of Starburst.

- end of story -

- a new story starts -

**Richie Billing:** The clomp of heels and wooden soled shoes echoed off the looming buildings of Basnett Street.

An autumnal wind sighed over the dinner voices, bringing a chill that cuts to the marrow. Some of the hunched forms looked my way, never for long. Silence. At last. I stood. Slabs of ice, where my feet should be. The shadows of the alley offer sanctuary, deep into the gloom, I found the basement window, boxes shielding it's

unmoved. After a last glance over my shoulder, I shoved them out of the way and slept inside. Mist billowed from my mouth more so than outside, the smell of rot seemed worse than usual. Dark as Williamson tunnels. I fumbled about for the palm size torch I'd found outside the grand office of a law firm on Old Hall Street.

It's emitted a dim flickering glow. Even without the torch I knew my way. Three weeks I've been here. It still made me smile. Living in the George Henry Lee Building. The place I used to come shopping with mum when I was a kid. It had all happened by chance. One night as I passed the boarded up building, I noticed workers loading a van at the top of the alley beside it. I'd slipped through a side door when they weren't looking and hidden. A warm dry night was all I was after, but nobody had returned. I had it all to myself, an empty palace. I left the basement, made my way up what had once been the staff staircase. I glanced at the door leading to the ground level shop floor, and froze. Clicked off the torch, held my breath, rushed to the wall, closest to the door and duck down behind it. Light. [Tense music]

One of the first things I tried when I moved in was the light switches. None had worked, including this one. Could someone else be in here? I looked through the tiny windows of the doors revealed nothing. I pushed one open winced as the creak shattered the silence of the room, moving at a crouch. I reached the near a shelving unit and after a deep breath peered into the open space beyond, empty as my stomach.

I held position. My breath too. And watch and waited to see if anyone revealed themselves by sight or sound. Satisfied. I was alone. I sighed, stood and regarded the lights. What had made them come back on, on my way to the room that become my own, a back office on the top floor. I tried other switches, some worked, some didn't, the power it seemed had been switched on.

This ought to be good news, no longer that I have to sit in darkness, living by the light of torches. Instead my knees churned in my stomach, it meant something. And I wasn't sure what. [Tense music ends]

- end of story -

- a new story starts -

**Samantha Roberts:** This is a story from my childhood. I must've been about five or six, I suppose. And I was in town with me dad. I don't know where we'd been or where we were going.

But we were walking up St. John's Lane towards Lime Street. [Street noise & a playful innocent music] Actually I think in those days, it was a while ago there were bus stops in Lime Street, so we may have been going to get the bus home. As we got to the steps of St. George's Hall, those long sweeping steps, me Dad said, run up those steps and counting them. Run along the top, come down the other end and count them again, coming down.

So I did, and it was a different number. I was confused. I did it again. And sure enough, it was a different count going up to coming down. How could that be? Well, of course it's because St. John's Lane slopes up to Lime Street. So as the steps get to the top of the Hill, they taper and flatten out and the bottom ones sort of disappear into the pavement. So there are indeed less steps at the top end.

Well, my six year old brain couldn't work that out. I just thought my dad was magic. I thought it was some clever magic trick that he had done and I just laughed and laughed. I don't think he explained it to me at the time. He just reveled in being a superhero and magician.

So now when I passed St. George's Hall, I admire its architecture. Its grandeur, its beauty, but also I always remember it's little magic trick, hidden on the steps.

- end of story -

- a new story starts -

**Beth Easton:** [A busy street noise] I watched them all piling off at the coaches and swarming towards me like an invasion. They bring a buzz. An excitement. Sometimes even tears. There is a mix of people, accents, genders, and I feel like I'm travelling the world. They rush over gearing to have their picture taken, fighting over who goes first as they pose with me. I note who's serious and who was up for a laugh. Enjoying those who choose to lean on me and copying my stunts. One woman touches my nose and giggles, sharing her excitement. One family bundle all around me, posing with the smallest at my knees. Can't deny, I like the attention and miss it as they rushed back to their coach.

I love it.

When people leave things draped on me, the wreath, the flowers, a scarf, sometimes sticking a cigarette in my mouth. When the tourists go home, I'm left with the workers hurrying past desperate to get to their jobs. But knowing as soon as they're in the office, they'll be desperate to leave.

The day goes past and, and a blur of tourists, workers and groups of teenagers and before I know it it's time for the evening shift to begin. I watched the bar staff opening up around me. Wondering what tales they'll be able to tell tomorrow. One guy always pats me on the head, on the way into a shift. I wasn't a fan at first, but now if he didn't do it, I honestly think I'd miss it.

I see the first drinker arriving and heading down to the bar. I know I'll not see him for hours until he stumbles out. Watch the groups of girls start arriving in their tight skirts and rocket heels. They often lean on me to fix a falling shoe strap and I smell their perfume. On an unlucky day, one will puke on me, but it's all just part of the job.

I love to watch the late night dog walks and pray the bundles of fluff don't need to relieve themselves. I watched the pigeons fly past and I often wonder what it would be like to be so unrestricted. I see the couple walking past kissing, so hopeful, young and free. I remember everything I once did as I watch others living their dream.

- end of story -

- a new story starts -

**Katharine Wright:** The Cure by Katherine Wright

The last place I went, before the descent of the country into a confusing soup of misinformation and repetitive days, was Liverpool. [Cinematic music] It had been a

rough few months. My anxiety peaked and public transport was suddenly this malign prospect in my life, made me panicky.

I went to the GP. I tweaked my meds. Liverpool was my goal.

Liverpool is medicine, a reward to myself. I go there with my loves and then return to fix my inevitably shattered heart. When I am broken, Liverpool is where I repair myself. In the wondrous Place exhibit at the Museum of Liverpool, all my cares, melt away, replaced with righteous fury that, even in a space dedicated to the rich and varied culture of the city, Gerry and the Pacemakers barely get a look in.

A light radiant with indignation, I pay my respects to the bronze Billy Fury and hum the chorus to Ferry Cross The Mersey. The most times I've ever burst into the song outside Liverpool One is three. They weren't one after another, usually someone cuts me off before I reach the second syllable of the word ferry.

I like that shoddy Beatles statue. You know, the one, I mean, incredulous at it's persistence and I know it's silly, but I swear that every time I visited, no matter what time of year the sun was blazing, baking. The whole city sparkling like a Drag Queens lippy, even when it was pissing it down or blowing a force 5,000 gale. Even in sourness, in memories that sting and pain that makes me breathless, it is easier to love myself on the concourse at Lime Street.

I am brave and I am beautiful. Liverpool welcomes me with open arms and a heart full of hope. I breathe in deeply and I let go.

Healing.

Healing.

Healed.

- end of story -

- a new story starts -

**Joseph Turner:** I haven't had a pint for eight months. [Pub atmosphere] Dry January overstayed it's welcome. And the pubs closing meant the only temptation to ruin my new found sobriety came from me mum, offering me a Mascaro gin and tonic on a Friday night. Maybe I'll never drink again. No more anxiety filled hangovers.

Never-ending dry mouth or sickly self loathing. I suppose that would mean no more Cons though. That's my local, The Cons. That's what we call it. The people who drink there, if you walk past it, you're probably thinking it was an abandoned bomb shelter, with it's tin roof and cold war aesthetic. It's so ugly you won't even find a picture of it on Google, which I think is an achievement in itself.

But it doesn't matter what a boozier look like, does it? It's about what goes on inside, the people who come and go, the bar staff, the footie team, the snooker lads, even compost corner, where the more senior drinkers sit and reminisce and moan about... well moan about anything really. A little community of drinkers.

Come to think of it, the unofficial motto of our football team is, we are the people, we drunkenly shout it after a win or defeat. Either way, it reminds us we're part of

something, something bigger, a collective. We, instead of I. A typical weekend in The Cons starts on a Friday, as we unsuccessfully, try to keep the noise down for the fellas who play dominoes in the corner.

They sit in studious silence, only breaking concentration for a sip of bitter or [Knock on a table] a knock on the table. I don't think it's lost on us, that we will be the ones playing someday. A band may play in the back room on a Saturday night. Which means friends and families, young and old, mingle and singing and dancing. Feet tappin' to the sound of a fiddle, and maybe a slowie with me mates nan on a dance floor the size of a phone box. When the band pack up it's time to see who fancies takin' over the mic, the night can't stop there. There's usually an acapella version of Physco Killer. Some over the top preaching or sing-a-longs of songs that have been passed on through generations and whose lyrics are written in the minds of those who wish to keep them alive.

Sunday is my drinking day. A day for proper drinkers who face the prospect of being hungover in work with resolute determination. Some people go to church, but this is almost religious for us. There's plenty similarities as well. Wine, shaking hands, singing. There's even someone who usually dominates the conversation.

You can't tell a Priest to shut up though. That's why I prefer the pub. Some Sundays there are four people, some there are 40. 20 quid in the kitty. Take your seat. And it's time to put the world to rights. Conversations, stories, arguments, debate. Nevermind leave or remain, Everton or Liverpool, Corbyn or Starmer. Do you have scouse on a plate or in a bowl? It's a bowl for me, but the debate rages on.

The site of Terry quietly strumming his guitar means at any moment, he's about to embark on a five hour set list of hit after hit. He's a human jukebox that gets better after having double Brandy. It's when the warm buzz of drunkenness sets in and you squint your eyes and look around and everybody smiling and singing to Carol King and Simon and Garfunkel. It's at that point, you realise what a special place it is. A weird and wonderful throwback to a different time. It feels like the best kept secret in Liverpool. Maybe that's why you can't find a picture of it on Google.

When it closed, it felt like the soundtrack to me life had been put on pause. The conversations, the singing, and the people. All taken for granted.

You worry it might not open again. And when there's less ale houses like this, there's less community. So I'll probably will ever drink again. And when I next sit down with a pint in The Cons, socially distance...of course, I'll have a look around at the people who make this place more than bricks, mortar, and a tin roof.

And I might just wish, but to meself, we are the people.

- end of story -

- a new story starts -

**Angela Simms:** [Cinematic music] A city of culture, a city to be proud of. That's what Liverpool always was to me. I remember being younger and taking advantage of all the opportunities that were on offer, being taken to the theatre, seeing Blood Brothers on The Empire for the first time. And when that gunshot rang around the theatre, thinking, this is the best thing I have ever seen, and I need to be a part of it.

Joining the Everyman Youth Theatre and performing on that stage, a stage that, before me so many others had made their names on. Goin' to the Bistro and it packed with artists, actors, directors, writers, and the atmosphere was just incredible. Being a teenager and just soaking it all in, the fact that I could study drama, in me own city, was amazing.

And I go to gigs every night. And yeah, I mean, some of them would be really shit. But some of them were just incredible. It was just that option that you could go anywhere in the city and you'd find music. It wasn't until I'd leave the city and I'd go and visit friends in universities and other cities, or I'd go to castings in London.

And I started to realise that not everybody saw Liverpool, the way that I saw Liverpool. That people's perceptions were skewed by an outdated impression that we were thieves, that we were scally's, that we were football thugs, a reputation that we never deserved, because we never were.

Liverpool is music. Liverpool is song. Liverpool is laughter. Liverpool is creativity. I remember in 2008, and I was asked to be a part of the opening ceremony for the Capital of Culture. And it was on the steps of St. George's Hall, such a beautiful building, and myself and my friend, we were, were angels, angels of the city. And we have these wings, that were six feet wide.

Absolutely incredible. And everything was happening. And the city was buzzin, the media were there and I remember being a part of it. And I remember feeling so proud that this was what people would see, that finally people would see who we are.

That we are cultured.

That we are creative.

That we are proud.

Finally they'd say, this is Liverpool. This is my Liverpool.

- end of story -

**Leanne Best:** Iya, my names Leanne Best. Err, you might've seen me in a good few things at the Everyman & Playhouse over the years. Unprotected, I was in Educating Rita, the 35th year anniversary production, with the glorious Con O'Neill, directed by the fantastic Gemma Bodinetz. And of course written by the one, the only Willy Russell, amongst others. I'm here because like you, the Everyman & Playhouse has got a huge place in my life and in my heart and in my creative life, I know times are tough, but if you can, if you're able, would you consider donating a few pennies, a few quid, to the Everyman & Playhouse, and you can do that by their website, [everymanplayhouse.com](http://everymanplayhouse.com). So that you can support them, so that we can support them, in continuing to provide a space to nurture artists, to tell stories, to continue having the conversations that we need to be havin' as a society.

I'm about to be a bit thesp-y but theres beautiful scene in Educating Rita where Frank and Rita are talking about Ian Foster and she doesn't really understand the concept and he keeps saying to her, only connect, only connect, and that for me is what theatre is and what storytelling is. And now more than ever, I think we need to connect, really need to connect. And these spaces are so valuable. They're valuable



for us, they're valuable for our young people, our young artists, to feel like they have a place to have a voice.

So yeah, if you can, would ya? Please? I will. And if you can't \*blows a kiss\* loads of love. Speak soon, bye.