



**SPREAD
THE WORD**



Longlisted 2017
Thin Lizzy
by
Kashmir Tutt

About the author page 20

Copyright © 2017 Kashmir Tutt

All rights reserved

Copying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

For permission requests from the publisher & author, write to:

hello@spreadtheword.org.uk
www.spreadtheword.org.uk

It's 1978 and Thin Lizzy are on tour, and I'm not allowed to go. I'm having a feeling of déjà vu here. I feel like this has happened to me before. Except this isn't 1975 and I'm not at school anymore. I'm at work nowadays and earning my own money. I'm a sort of adult. We have regular arguments which have an almost undeviating script:

"But why not? Why can't I go?"

"Because you're a girl, that's why. Girls don't do that sort of thing"

"They do and they can. Why can boys do it then?"

"English girls can do it, but we don't do it. Who are these people any way? Which one's your father?" This was supposed to be insulting, implying that I thought these rough looking rock-star men as so important that they held the same significance as a parent, especially that of a patriarch.

"I know they're not my bloody fathers, any of them, I just want to go and see them!" I shout like the frustrated teenager that I am.

"What are they then, Gods?"

(Yes! I say in my head. Yes, Phil is God. They're all Gods. I love them. I worship these Gods.)

*"They're disgusting people. They're just drunks and druggies. They've never done a day's work in their lives. Look at the state of him, he looks like a tramp." **She's pointing at Phil Lynott!***

"What's he wearing? What does he look like? The idiot. In India people kick his sort out of the way. Looks like someone's already had a kick, look at his black eye. There're plenty of minstrels that look like him in India. They play a few notes, sing a few songs for a couple of coins, and then squander everything on alcohol and drugs. They spend their whole lazy lives sitting

around begging. What kind of existence is that? That's no life. It's not a respectable way of making a living... "

If I was to be perfectly honest it did sound a bit like the life of a rock star, but on a very miniscule scale. After all rock stars did play a load of tunes, make a fortune and spend most of the time off their heads, and it was no big secret about Phil's excessive drinking and drug-taking. And yes he probably had been in a drunken fight, and correct... that is a black eye. He's always getting into fixes and I'd read about that incident in the papers.

"... These people have no morals, no values.. Look at him... bla bla bla..."

I'm not listening, or at least, trying not to. All I want to do is watch Top of the bloody pops. I've known all week that Thin Lizzy will be on, and now she's bloody moaning and talking over the music while I'm trying to soak up the whole three-and-a-half minutes of pure genius.

"Next tour I am definitely going to see Thin Lizzy. You just wait and see!"

It is all over the news that the trains are on strike. It is 1980 and Thin Lizzy are playing Stafford Bingley hall, and I am going to be there, no matter what. I have a ticket for the concert, and I don't care how I get there.

Imagine an equal triangle where the base of the left vertical starts with total pessimism and its peak is maximum optimism, and on the other side, the base of the right vertical is *very* intelligent and at its peak is *sheer* stupidity. Well I'm there, right at the top where the two points meet. I am eighteen and optimistic to the point of stupidity. Sheer naivety is the reason why I haven't been murdered.

"No, but seriously how are you going to get there Sam?" Asks Curly who always abbreviated the surname I was born with from Samra, to Sam.

"I dunno, I'll catch the train."

"Haven't you heard the news, stoops? All the Midlands trains are on strike."

"They might not be!"

"And have you told yer mom yet?"

"No"

"What? What d'you mean *no*, stoops?"

"I can't tell her because she'll say no."

"But you've got the ticket already."

"Yeah, and I'll just go. She'll think I'm at work, and I won't be"

"But the concert starts in the evening, stoops..."

The trains are on strike, but luckily for me, on this day, the train for Stafford is running on time - to get there at least, though there is no mention of a return train. I am not thinking that far ahead.

"So what you gonna do then, Sam?" asks Curly.

"I listened to Midlands Today, and they said there are some trains" I reply.

"Yeah, you can get there, but you won't get back. What you gonna do when you're stuck in Stafford?"

"I dunno, I'll see what happens." I am hoping things will change and there just *might* be a late train, especially because of the concert. I mean, how are people supposed to get back home at that time of night, if there aren't any trains?

"You'll have to hitch a ride back" says Curly, apprehensively.

The fields of Stafford lay stretched out before me. The sun was shining. My heart fluttered, and my chest glittered with the words 'Thin Lizzy' as the silver logo reflected in the warm rays. I'd never been anywhere on my own in my entire life, except for the bus into town for work, and I'd never taken a train alone.

Not more than seventy minutes earlier I'd been staring into the shop window of Cyclops records on New Street in Birmingham. The same window I had stared into since 1977; since starting work in Birmingham's Jewellery quarter, and going into town every lunchtime to walk around record shops, or the Oasis market looking for Thin Lizzy memorabilia.

I'd buy anything to do with Thin Lizzy; tee-shirts, badges, lapels which I'd sew onto the back pocket of my jeans, or onto my ex-army canvas rucksack bought in the army and navy stores shop on broad street. I'd wear clothes and jewellery to make me look like a rocker sort. Not any old black-leather-clad-greasy-Joe rocker type like the band members of Kiss, not that kind of easy to pull off fashion; it had to be a Phil Lynott look. Hooped earrings replicating the silver ones that Phil wore, some small, some bigger, unevenly worn in each ear in four tiny holes with various crosses and beads hooked into the loops. Wrist bands with studs, a green and brown real leather belt with a big silver buckle, depicting a horse's head in the centre of a horse shoe...though it was an upside-down horse shoe with all the luck running out. A neat and tidy white snug-fitting cotton shirt, with pointed collars and front pockets, sleeves rolled up, braces, a waistcoat, occasionally a thin black tie, and always extremely tight drainpipe jeans. Sometimes I'd wear the tightest

cotton jeans, similar to a pair Phil Lynott had, which were red with thin black stripes. They were so tight that I'd battle with them for ages because my feet would get stuck taking them off. It would be like trying to pull the skin off a chicken drumstick, and getting stuck at the knobby end bit. I nurtured the whole rocker look based on what Phil wore, from tee-shirts to smart shirts, ties, denim, short embroidered jackets, stripy jumpers, buckles, and braces, and of course the prerequisite leather jacket.

Now here I was. I couldn't believe how far I'd come. Stafford was less than forty miles away, but it wasn't the distance that I'd travelled that thrilled me. It was the years of wishing, dreaming, staying awake into the small hours listening to BRMB radio, in case Robin Valk played some or other Thin Lizzy track. It was about not missing even the repeats of Top of the Pops, or the Old Grey Whistle Test, when Lizzy were on. It was about the posters I was never 'approvingly' allowed to have on my walls, and the stashed away L.P's that couldn't be played because I didn't have a turn-table. It was about how I'd stood my ground and finally got here. The ground I was standing on in Stafford, the same ground that Phil Lynott and the rest of Thin Lizzy would also soon be on.

On the train I got a small pang of guilt for going against my mom's wishes, but it left as fast as it had arrived. I could worry about that later. Right now I was buzzing with excitement, and expectation. I had no idea what to expect. I'd seen Lizzy on the stage for years and years - on television screens, but what would it be like to have them stand right in front of me? In the same room? In their real and alive bodies, with their real and alive voices, singing those familiar songs and strumming those screaming guitars!

When I got off the train I followed signs that pointed out Stafford Bingley Hall. After that I followed anyone who looked a bit young, long-haired and freaky, and that was enough. There were only a few people about. It was easy to spot fellow rockers, with or without, the printed tee-shirts. There was a certain aura about them, or maybe it was the unkempt anarchic hair.

Once out of the small town, the fields ahead were clearly visible, and if there was a track which people were walking along, then you knew you were on the right trail. It was like a pilgrimage. The centre of activity, our Mecca, was only across the fields. This whole getting to Stafford thing had been a walk in the park...so far.

I think I'm grinning now. No matter what I was expecting, it just wasn't this. I've gone into a spin. I've walked about three miles - who knows, I was walking on air all the way here. There's a huge field in the middle of nowhere and in this field there's a gigantic cowshed-like structure, and dozens of eighteen to twenty-something year olds who look like me. Well not exactly. I'm brown and no-one else here is, not a single person, but that's not unfamiliar. It's something I've been used to in my earlier years when brown was always the odd one out.

I'm surrounded by a massive group of denim-clad long-haired, young people. It's as if I've just discovered my clan. These are the early arrivals, like starlings choosing places to congregate, and waiting for the masses to come. Thin Lizzy fans are everywhere and they all look every bit as fanatical about the Lizzy as me. Everyone is hanging around, standing, sitting, lying in the tall grass, eating food picnic-style. They're in big groups, small groups, pairs

and trios, all talking, laughing, smoking, drinking from beer-cans or two-litre sized plastic bottles.

I go and queue.

I'm standing twelfth position from the front. I might have been closer if I had gone straight into the queue, but it took me a while to take everything in and gage what was happening. There are a couple of lads standing next to me, and we strike up a conversation:

"...What's yer favourite album? What's yer favourite track? Have you got all their albums? Have you seen Lizzy before? What other music do you like?"

Y'know that sort of thing.

These two lads are from the black country. They're only eighteen years old, hence like me they're queuing. The mature fans are all over the place, probably in the pubs of Stafford town centre. None of us move from our positions and we hold each others' places when we have to visit the port-a-loos. It's around 1 p.m. We wait patiently for the doors to open. They'll be opening at eight o'clock. Only seven hours to go.

As we get to know each other, it transpires that I don't have any food or water. I haven't been to a concert before, least of all one which is in the middle of a field. I hadn't planned on eating or drinking, or even getting hungry, besides there was always, usually, a Bakers Oven where you could buy a sausage roll or a doughnut. Except there isn't, not in this field. The nearest shops are back in town, but there's not even the slightest chance in hell of me giving up my place in the queue, to go and get food. I would much rather starve.

The crowd are very friendly, and with still more than six hours to kill, there's nothing to do except to sit down, lean against the fabric of Stafford Bingley's

barn-like hall, and get to know the people who are sitting in the near vicinity, but not too far from my place in the queue.

"*So where d'yow live?*" the blonde guy with the long straight hair asks. He's in eleventh position. He is obviously trying to look like Scot Gorham, the American member of Thin Lizzy, who is my second favourite in the band, because of his good looks and musical contribution. He is only just about growing on me especially because of his looks, otherwise I did not like this intrusion of Thin Lizzy by new members. The original trio as far as I was concerned, were the true Thin Lizzy. Unfortunately that trio had split long before I got to see them.

"*In Edgbaston, what about you?*" I ask in return.

"Smerrick"

I laugh. I hadn't heard Smethwick pronounced like that before.

"*Did yow come ere on yer owun?*" asks Scot.

"*Yeah, I came by train*" I tell them, with a small apprehension suddenly jumping about in my head trying to unnecessarily worry me.

"*I thort the trains worn't runnin today*" says Scot's friend pushing his dark curly bush only slightly away from his eyes. He was in tenth position. He had a black shoe lace tied around his neck with a silver and black cross hanging from it, and wore about twenty bangles, bracelets, and bands in various colours, threads, and beads around his wrists. He obviously tried to look like Phil Lynott, but he only had the hair, and then not even that. They both wore denim jackets with denim jeans and Doc-Marten style boots.

"*Tch, well that's what everyone's saying, but I'm hoping there'll be a train.*" I say with a slight sigh and doing my best to still think positively.

"There woon't be a train though." says Scot whose name was actually Ian.

"You woon't ger'ome y'know, you'll be stuck ere overnight. 'sup-pose yow could stay at the station till tomorra" offers Jake. This suggestion worries me.

"There might not be any trains tomorra either" adds Ian.

"How did you both get here?" I ask them.

"Our Dad dropped us off in 'is car. And 'is gunoo pick us up 'an all. Yow could cum with us in our car. I'm shoe-a our Dad woon't my-ind" says Ian.

See, I knew I'd be alright after all! I had been sure all along that something would come along. Phew, now that I had a lift back to Birmingham promised to me, I could stop worrying. In reality I was more worried now of what might *have* happened, than when it was more likely to have happened.

A man came out to look at our tickets, and to rip off the perforated end of this valuable, and highly prized document. One after the other the tickets were checked, starting nearest the closed door of Bingley Hall and then down the queue and deeper into the crowds, where I noticed metal barriers had suddenly appeared to fence off and enclose the huge crowds of rockers, into manageable numbers. These hadn't been here earlier in the day when everything was more relaxed. The relaxed mood now seemed to have changed into an edgy anticipation.

The stupid man had ripped off the corner of my ticket! If I'd have known he was going to do that, I would have folded it accurately, and scraped my thumb nail several times along the perforation marks, to make it easier for him to rip off the counterfoil. He damaged the corner of what would become a

monumental piece of paper, thereafter to be framed and hung up in every house I would ever live.

We waited for another half an hour. The crowd were no longer as friendly. Everyone was positively pushing forward and the queue was not as straight as it had been. In fact there wasn't a queue! People who'd been in position thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen and God knows what position down the line, perhaps at number twenty something *and* beyond, were now standing next to me, in front of me, behind me, and pushing me. Hey what about queuing? Shoulders were leaning unnecessarily more to the left or to the right under the pretence of casually waiting while all the time preparing to barge past as soon as possible, and elbows were edging into tiny gaps, then widening and clamping into spaces that hadn't previously existed.

"*C'mon on now, get ready, this is it...*" Ian and Jake are grinning. They've done it all before. It's easy for them. They didn't warn me enough. They forgot to give me the minutiae.

Suddenly it's like the gates of heaven have been opened and all the sinners who get inside within five seconds will be granted a reprieve. All and sundry left outside will burn at the bottom of the hell's pit. Everyone is running past me, even though I had been in twelfth position all day long!

I realise that this was why the tickets had been checked, because now suddenly other big gates along the sides of the building have been opened. The bouncers and security on the doors want to rush everyone in as swiftly as possible, and the crowd are more than happy to oblige.

When I get inside there are hundreds of people like starlings in flight all headed for the stage. They are swirling in from doors at the back of this huge

cow-shed and even from entrances on the other side of the building. There had been little point in queuing near the front because as long as you were by a door, any door, you would get in as quickly as anyone else. Everyone is running, soaring in, it's all hectic yet graceful, bodies are close, but not quite touching, except for those holding hands or linking arms. The swarm is thick and thin in places but it's gathering and thickening and stopping abruptly nearest the front end of the hall. At this point I leg it. Like the starlings I am no longer part of the small group that I have been feeding with throughout the day, now I am part of this entity, this swirling mass, yet I am entirely alone. I run as fast as I can. I can't see Ian and Jake any more. I have lost them in the crowd. For the moment my only concern is to get to the front. I will have to look for the lads later.

I join the sea of people. I'm just part of another wave and I'm going to crash and splash into the stationary starlings. I don't care, I do just that. I'm the foam of a breaking wave and I press into, push past, needle my way, get into the crevices between denim, leather, and cotton. People glare, and elbow, and stand firm, but I weave my way in... and get to the front! There I hold onto the barrier, and stretch out all thirty-one inches of my strong, muscular, youthful arms. And lock them into position. No one is going to take this space. I look around for Ian and Jake. Maybe they'll see me. I think about my lift home. They expect me to be at the front, we had agreed on that. Maybe they will turn up in a minute, and find me here, but they don't.

I'm being pushed into the barrier but it's not too bad. We still have a safe space around us, and only when the music livens up does it get hot and close

as the body of people jump and dance pogo-style, arms raised and fists punching the air. Hips, and arms, and feet, collide and crush.

The warm-up band play their stuff, and leave the stage.

Gaps open up and close, as fans head off to the toilets or for a smoke. My eyes search for familiar faces, for number one, or six or seven. None. Not a single one from the crowd I'd spent the afternoon with. The lads never appeared again. I didn't know what had happened to them.

This was only the beginning. After the longest wait of my life, our flock of starlings are settled, not on the tops of trees, but on the open floor-space of Bingley Hall. Small groups of stray starlings swoop in, or flit about hurriedly looking for positions. The dominant males easily come to roost in the best places while the young and weak get shoved aside, but not this bird. I'm staying *right* here, in prime position.

We are at the pinnacle of this *murmuration*. Low indistinct individual voices on mass, are deafeningly loud. Occasionally the crowd breaks into chants followed by loud clapping and simultaneous foot stamping: "LIZ-ZY", clap clap clap, "LIZ-ZY" clap clap clap. "LIZ-ZY!" We are shouting at the tops of voices, and the palms of our hands hurt from the force of overwhelming passion.

We wait for the showdown. Then the lights in the stadium switch off. We are standing in darkness. We're ready for flight. We can't see clearly but some people have stepped onto the quiet and darkened stage. I hold my breath. There is a pause. Two more seconds and this silence could break. We are on the cusp between silent anticipation and impatient mutterings.

Pause...one...two... then:

WHOOSH! Blinding lights. It's like the Gestapo have arrived. The lights are in our faces, and we are holding up our hands to shield our eyes from the glare. We can't see our foe, and can only be at the mercy of whatever will happen next. The stage is emblazoned with the words THIN LIZZY. The lettering is more than ten feet high. The illumination from this logo is white...bright...light...on this perfect night! They almost drip with a blinding, glittering, sparkling, metal.

The hush of the crowd is intense.

At the fringes of the stage Phil is probably grinning, he is ready, poised, base in his hand, metal-studded guitar strap over his shoulder, metal-studded belt around his waist; Brian at his side. He can hear us calling. This is his moment. Their moment. My moment. Our moment. Scot and Robbo are larking about. Robbo's already had the best part of a bottle of whiskey and Scot has tripped along the opium trail.

There's an almighty blast and stage smoke is rising in plumes at various points on this platform of promise. It has a glorious smell of rock music, of talent, of passion, of unleashed dreams, of unapologetic life. This memorable smell of freedom and happiness would remain my friend.

Through this combined mist and blinding light, in steps the fox to thunderous applause... and the birds take flight. Tonight every star that ever existed will shine brightly in a sky somewhere. "Tonight there's gonna be jailbreak... somewhere in this town...you see me and the boys we don't like it... so were getting up and going down." Arms reach higher than they physically should. Punches hit the air with a dynamic force enough to burst a blood vessel.

I am there... I am here. Finally. *This* is Thin Lizzy, and *that* is Phil Lynott standing two feet above my head, five feet from my fingertips.

Phil is doing what he does. All I can see are legs. Leather-clad. Long. He is taller than ever before. He is alive and dangerous. He is singing and playing his guitar, and I recognise the music. This is the music I have listened to in the dark late hours. The music that kept me looking forward to something far away and out of reach. And now it is here. I can touch it. It touches me. It's invisible and I'm wearing it like a shroud. No, it's closer than that, it's like a second skin, soaking into my own, going through and even deeper than that. It's in my blood, it's inside me. In the very fibre of me.

The music is falling from the stage and showering me. I am covered by the pure magic of Phil's voice and the notes of guitars and drum beats, and sweat. Yes! Phil has dropped the vapour from his skin onto mine. Onto my forehead and my cheeks. I will never wash again.

As I walk through the field and then along the long country lanes, I can think of nothing but the concert. I am completely deaf. The music has been unbelievably loud, just the way I like it, and all I can hear is a long whistling tone in each ear. I can still feel Phil's voice strumming my heart strings. The palms of my hands are swollen from the beating they've had, and my cheeks burn with heat and joy. I am grinning as I clutch Snowy Whites' small white plectrum in my right hand, and my leather jacket in the other.

"*You'll have to hitch a ride back*" Curly's words come to me. Oh damn! This must be the time to do that. Now I am starting to worry. My mind is getting back into gear. The traffic is hardly moving, and I'm passing car after car. I'm

remembering lyrics of an old Vanity Fare song: "*a thumb goes up, a car goes by, It's 1.a.m. and here am I, hitchin a ride.*" The windows on the passenger side of nearly every vehicle are open, and different Thin lizzy songs come blasting out from each of them. I'm brought back to the joy of now. They are showboating. That's why they've got the windows down. Everyone is saying: "*Look at me, listen to my music. I'm the biggest Thin Lizzy fan ever there was, have you heard this track?*"

This is the opportunity I need. I don't even have to stop the cars, they are almost stationary. I just have stick out a thumb, or even lean over towards a car, and just ask. But I can't. I don't have the nerve. I've never done it before. I'm scared. I'm too shy. I'm embarrassed. I don't want to. I don't like to do it.

It's around midnight. At the end of this country lane there'll be no other traffic, only the cars of concert-goers. Then there'll be a quick dispersal as the cars drive off along 'A' roads and motorways and Thin Lizzy fans who'd been united all day, will be scattered in all directions. I'm ever the optimist and I can't bear to even think about being stranded at the station. I'll be in a lot of trouble if I don't get home tonight. I'm probably already in trouble, because although I kept threatening that I would go to the concert, I never really quite came out and told my mom directly that I'd bought a ticket, and that she couldn't stop me going because I'd be going anyway, no matter what she said. I had been brave enough to do it, but not brave enough to stand up against my mom's own beliefs.

I'm just trying to stay positive. I'll just check at the train station before I do anything else. There just *might* be a train, y'never know.

Maybe I *should* try and get a lift, we have after all been to the same place for the same reason, and everyone had in one way or another, found their way to Stafford. Maybe, just maybe one of these drivers had come from Birmingham? In another two miles these cars will have all disappeared. The cars are actually moving now, still not quite as fast as me, but they are picking up a little speed. The station is still a long way off. What if no one else is walking that way?

Now the cars have started passing me, where previously I had been passing them. It'll be too late soon.

I hold out a thumb while the rest of my fingers hold on tightly to Snowy's plectrum. I'm not doing it noticeably. It's a pathetic limp effort, and when a car gets too close I drop my hand in case they see my thumb. I notice a few other people holding out their thumbs openly and visibly and this gives me some confidence to hold my thumb erect, but not to raise my arm above waist level.

What I don't know is that the train station has been quiet all day. No trains left the station. Now it is in complete darkness and silence. On this early May, cold night it would be a sorry and uncomfortable place to sleep. There won't be a train to Birmingham.

At home they have been worried about me. They realised at around six thirty that I wasn't coming home, but they knew where I would be, and that it was now too late do anything about it. They haven't realised how the train strikes might affect me, and they have no idea of what time I'd be home again. Neither did I.

My mom has waited anxiously, she has gone to bed, has even fallen asleep through her worry. My brother is walking the streets to see if he can see me heading towards home...

About the Author

Kashmir Tutt arrived in Birmingham, England aged 2. She has a bachelor's degree in Integrated studies from the University of Birmingham. She is the second sibling of five and the eldest daughter, which was why she, as a Sikh girl, was 'never allowed' to do things her English contemporaries took for granted.

Her father was killed in a car accident in 1969 but he left a life-long imprint, and a second- hand stereo, from which her ethics and musical taste grew.

She gave up a twenty-five year career in the commercial sector to take up life, which has mostly been spent travelling, teaching, reading or dreaming. She enjoys music, gardening, house design and all things aesthetically pleasing. Kashmir is currently writing a humorous memoir set in the 1960's and '70's (when the greatest music was produced), featuring a bilingual brummy upbringing, and a passion for the rock band *Thin Lizzy*.