SONGS FOR AN AUGUST MOON

LARRY KAPLAN
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Everyone has a story to tell, and to me, the joy of writing and singing is discovering those stories in the unexpected ways we do in the course of our day to day lives, then trying to fashion songs that bring dignity to the stories.

If a ballad is indeed a story told in song, then it cannot begin without the story. It was out of the folk tradition and the years of listening and learning from others, that I have learned to pay attention to things people say and do; always the tip of the iceberg, reminding myself in piles of notes on napkins, paper bags, envelopes, etc. for “later”—all prompts to remain mindful that one’s life is an endless collection of stories, so many of which can and should be shared.

So here is my second ‘collection.’ It comes from people’s journeys and lives, influenced by the folk music I grew up listening to and playing, and inspired by the importance of the story, simple or complex, old, or new... thank you for listening.

With masterful attention to detail, poetic turns of phrase, and lilting musical sensibility, Larry Kaplan transports us to lives and times... both far in the past and contemporary.

Cindy Kallet
Where the mud's too wet
All them years... all them years -
And the river's too heavy,
And the rain kept coming down.
And it rained a little longer;
Then it rained another month
Farms sitting low
When it ended got another,
Up in the town and down by the levee
Current got a little stronger
Well, I figure that she ought to
River got a little wider
Got a week of rain,
Cow can't swim
It rained all night and day
Rained all night, and it rained all day.

You'd never, ever see
Just the kind of thing you said
And wouldn't you know
And you're planting every year,
Then everything you've owned
When you struggle every winter
Goes washing out of here
Well, it don't seem right
Well we laid her keel
She gave our babies food to eat
Then they sank her in the tide.

She was his (to begin with,
Look her over, I'm going inside.
There ain't nothing wrong with
He changed her name to 'The Isabel'
On the day that he married me.
If she don't crest soon
They should put a river here,
When you worked too hard,
She was twenty one feet at the
When the timbers turned to steel.

She was here long before
And there ain't nothing wrong with her,
She was his (to begin with,
You worked too hard,
Put love in their hearts,
As a ship too proud to give up that way
Old paint peeling like a sad tear.
Then she sailed to long and she
So we built that vessel so damn well
Well it don't seem right
You get a mighty washing,
Well we laid her keel
When he got to take precautions
When you struggle every winter
When the rust took over,
And she met my grandfather in Portland,
She gave shelter and we gave her time,
Well it's too late for the breaking yard,
The Isabel' was - the story-she never shared.
They sink her in the tide.
She was his (to begin with,

So she resisted there with the lonely gull
Money was never the plan.
While the young men drove her down.
When the rust took over,
She's been resting evermore.
Well she's twenty one feet
So let's raise a glass and a dozen more
To remind us of the times before
And the wind skipping over the waves.

Well they sank her in the tide.
That bloody beach in the autumn dew.
Could have carried sail
And she gave our babies food to eat
When the sunken, rails
She was twenty one feet

She sailed to long and she
So we gave her shelter
Tack the woodwork out
Without a doubt more

Well the Isabel' was - the story-she never shared.
They didn't have the time
Put love in their hearts,
It's too late for the breaking yard,
And the wind skipping over the waves.
You stand alone in your garden
I hear up North,
They once helped to build.
And all them little towns
And all them little towns
They have no fear
When you worked too hard,
I fancy the whistling trades;
To scrap her anymore

When I married me.
You can't swim
She was twenty one feet
She was here long before
You put food on the table.
Well she's twenty one feet

Well she's twenty one feet
Well when I married me.
Well she's twenty one feet
You can't swim

Well she's twenty one feet

Well she's twenty one feet

Well she's twenty one feet
4. DEAREST LAVINIA
I once came across a 19th-Century photograph of a steamer returning to the United Kingdom from the United States filled with immigrants who did not find the future they had sought. It occurred to me that we never hear about people whose dreams change or whose futures do not turn out as planned. Canadian folklorist and singer Clary Croft has recorded a wonderful version of this song on his CD, "Still the Song Lives On."©1992 Hannah Lane Music, BMI

Dearest Lavinia, I trust all is well.
Our ship makes this passage on terrible swells.
When I reach England,
I shall welcome the day.

By the time this note finds you, please God, I'll be home.
I am sorry for leaving, please forgive me for going.
By your side on safe land.
I could not find fortune on American soil.
I bring nothing home to you, but a year's sweat and toil.
I am so sorry for leaving,
I wish I had never been born.

If I ever reach England,
I shall make this long journey no more.

Dear Lavinia, I trust all is well.
Our ship makes this passage on terrible swells.
When I reach England,
I shall welcome the day.

By the time this note finds you, please God, I'll be home.
I am sorry for leaving, please forgive me for going.
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I am so sorry for leaving,
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If I ever reach England,
I shall make this long journey no more.

Now I dream I am sailing
with the stars in the sky.
And I follow the brightest one
back to your eyes.

We tried her again.
And with her side to the swell,
She was sure she had lost.

5. EMMA'S ATTIC
This song attempts to tell the story of one person's life through items found neatly stored in an attic.

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Books in three languages,
old magazines
And old stamps from the cards,
Sent from the places,
imagined in dreams
Wherever they are.

Scissors on a hook
inside the old attic wall,
Toys in a carton and a card with a heart
And a crutch from the fall;
Ribbons of red and blue
from four county fairs,
Ribbons of pink and a blue
morning glory
That she wore in her hair.

Torn overalls, porcelain dolls
Muddy sneakers with holes,
New leather shoes
that she hardly used
And a rose from the ball.

Letters from college,
with the grades on a card
Seven As and a B.
And a note from her brother saying,
"I'll explain later."
"Emma, hurry home, please."

Pictures of aunts and uncles
down at the shore,
Mothers and daughters,
and one of her father.
When she was just four.
Long-winded letters
from a restless young man.
Pleading to take her away
from this place
To a different land.

A box full of hats,
winter coats on a rack
And a trunk full of clothes.
Receipts from the luggage
She brought home from the steamer
And then left in the hold.

But I left my own country
for the promise of wealth,
Which I sought for our family,
ever once for myself.
Now I see greater fortune,
in our stone covered land,
I shall make this long journey
no more.

There were thousands who
journeyed to find that great land
And thousands who settled with the new life they planned
But then also the many who would
miss their homeland
And the dear ones who never said "go."

Now I dream I am sailing
with the stars in the sky.
And I follow the brightest one
back to your eyes.

We tried her again.
And with her side to the swell,
She was sure she had lost.

6. GET HER INTO SHORE
Written one cold, January day in Providence, Rhode Island, following a particularly bad ice storm. I was thinking about people I knew who made their living at sea in all kinds of weather. A few days after I wrote the song, a Providence Journal article appeared describing a very similar incident, with three lost.©1997 Hannah Lane Music, BMI

Well we set our traps in the bitter cold.
On the third day of the year —
There were three of us then,
We were the youngest of ten.
Two for lines, and one to steer.
When it blows Northeast on the Georges Bank
You don't like to take your time.
But the engine was old.
It didn't like the cold.
And we fell back on our lines.

Get her into shore.
She can't take it anymore.
We're too far from home.
It's gonna break her bones.
Can't you get her into shore?

Jack throws the switch.
He says, you old son of a bitch.
What the hell do you think you're doing?
Well you've brought us
to the poor house.
Too many times.
You ain't taking us to our ruin.
But the line went slack.
We saw the stern turn back.
And we started up again.
But she just tightened up.
And I knew we were stuck.

Tom picks up the axe.
Cuts us free from the traps.
He swung so hard he smashed the rail.
Then he looks hard at me.
And he spits in the sea.
His face was whiter than the hail.
We tried her again.
Gave her all that we could.
And we felt that screw turn round.
And I remember, I prayed.
For some more steereage way.
On that black and ugly ground.

Get her into shore.

Jack puts her hard over.
So to run with the tide.
But she fell into the trough.
And with her side to the swell,
She was sure she had lost.

I just wished I'd never been born.

Get her into shore.

Well the tide runs hard.
In the wintertime.
You're a fool to go and try.
God help the poor man.
Who is born on the sea.
God save the poor ones who die.

Get her into shore.
Busted broke, no place to go, that's what he says you get, For putting all your time into the sea. Then a man gets old, he says, too late to settle down, he says; Too late to find a place for company. He's alone, he wears and not a word - and he's worked his hands. Soon we'll all be leaving; the one thing that I never do. 

Keep your lanterns on and throw the big hatch open wide. No man is a stranger in the cold. Throw another log into the fire, the night is young enough. And good friends keep a man from getting old. Bub your hands together, pull your collar up - Rub your hands together, the night is young enough, whose dust turned into shale. claimed a bounty for their land. A song for anyone who thinks we are.

Breeze out of the east .. I'm teaching my son how to sail. There are boulders in our way; I'm teaching my son how to sail. There are boulders in our way; To come all this way from Canada, They have come ten million days ... Chief Joshua stood alone and They watched their river turn to red. 

No man is a stranger in the cold. Who can afford gasoline? He's at the tiller Tide, help this river get him by, every native child they killed. 

The boats are sitting crooked and not a soul - those empty dreams that took you in. The one thing that I never do. 

John comes home to his old boat, he's alone, he wears His stocking cap pulled down upon his ears; Two years going and he's worked his hands To stone and leather, says tonight he's got to get away, who do the leaving. 

John comes home to his old boat, he's alone, he wears His stocking cap pulled down upon his ears; Two years going and he's worked his hands To stone and leather, says tonight he's got to get away, who do the leaving. 

I'm teaching my son how to sail. There are boulders in our way; I'm teaching my son how to sail. There are boulders in our way; 

The pages of a distant time slide past - and at every turn that lets them pass, they take what roots they can. At Joshua's Rock he stood and watched that muddy river glide. 

To stone and leather, Ten years going Take your chances boys, Upon his ears; None of it matters. We'll drink another round from getting old. But kids get distracted and not a word - those empty dreams that took you in. The one thing that I never do. 

To stone and leather, Ten years going Take your chances boys, Upon his ears; None of it matters. We'll drink another round from getting old. But kids get distracted and not a word - those empty dreams that took you in. The one thing that I never do. 

The bogs from which these waters flow dry every year. No boats on the water. No boats on the water. Who can afford gasoline? 

Foggy harbor, cold and wet and not a soul - those empty dreams that took you in. The one thing that I never do. 

I could have made time And I could have made time And I could have made time. Rain, turn these stones back into sand, 

I wrote this one afternoon at Joshua's Rock. I wrote this one afternoon at Joshua's Rock. I wrote this one afternoon at Joshua's Rock. I wrote this one afternoon at Joshua's Rock. I wrote this one afternoon at Joshua's Rock. 

I'm teaching my son how to sail. There are boulders in our way; I'm teaching my son how to sail. There are boulders in our way; Though still an old great waterway, this river seems too new to settle a down, he says; 

I'm teaching my son how to sail. There are boulders in our way; I'm teaching my son how to sail. There are boulders in our way; 

The monuments of modern time along these shores of stone, From Hartford up to Bellows Falls spell sewage, oil, and foam; New settlers along her banks still search for willing land. And at every turn that lets them pass, they take what roots they can. At Joshua's Rock he stood and watched that muddy river glide. 

Through still an old great waterway, this river seems too new to settle a down, he says; 

I'm teaching my son how to sail. There are boulders in our way; I'm teaching my son how to sail. There are boulders in our way;
Well she's broad around at seven
What honor is bestowed on me,
To be safe in the sea
Piloted what appears to be the first
Iron, a pickle barrel at sea,
Ezra Lee of Old Saybrook, Connecticut
Built of oak staves bound with
Lived to a ripe old age. Two full scale
Deployment took place in New York
Harbor and apparently provided much
Entertainment to the crews of invading
British warships. (Ezra by the way,
Was the unfortunate sailor who
Was the first one in this land,
A powerful explosive charge
This lever lets me set it free
On any ship at all,
A pickle barrel at sea,
Now lower me through that little
But I can't sail a pickle barrel,
Can't make this bucket steer
I'm drifting with an awful tide,
This was once a different land
Tide, help this river get me by,
I have come ten million days...

10. BUSHNELL'S
INFERNAL MACHINE
Ezra Lee of Old Saybrook, Connecticut
Was the unfortunate sailor who
Piloted what appears to be the first
US submarine, a design never mass
Produced - for good reason. The fateful
deployment took place in New York
Harbor and apparently provided much
Entertainment to the crews of invading
British warships. (Ezra by the way,
Was the unfortunate sailor who
Was the first one in this land,
A powerful explosive charge
This lever lets me set it free
On any ship at all,
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Now lower me through that little
But I can't sail a pickle barrel,
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Tide, help this river get me by,
I have come ten million days...

11. LIYANNA
A song about New England.... even if
didn't say that exactly!
©1976 Hannah Lane Music, BMI
Lonesome, nobody knows me
Sometimes I think nobody cares;
Concrete rivers and concrete faces
The wind blows hard but she don't
Blow fair.
And oh, the many colored mountains
And oh, the blue and singing sea,
You can hear the Green Man in the wind,
Well she's broad around at seven
What honor is bestowed on me,
To be safe in the sea
Piloted what appears to be the first
Iron, a pickle barrel at sea,
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I'm drifting with an awful tide,
This was once a different land
Tide, help this river get me by,
I have come ten million days...

12. ECHO ON THE MOUNTAIN
This song remembers the late Sandy
Paton who loved nothing more than
Finding — then sharing the music of so
Many traditions — including his own.
©1992 Hannah Lane Music, BMI
There's a place filled with
Peace, on a hill facing east
You can hear the Green Man in the wind,
Where the river runs gentle and
every song's sentimental
Now an echo's been lost... for a while.
He knew miles of back roads through
Green Mountains, I'm told
And a tune by the side of Loch Tay,
He crossed bridges of snow,
And he loved yarrow, you know
And good people who visit... then stay.
The Revolution rages on,
The wind blows hard but she don't
Blow fair.
And oh, the many colored mountains
And oh, the blue and singing sea,
You can hear the Green Man in the wind,
Well she's broad around at seven
What honor is bestowed on me,
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Piloted what appears to be the first
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Was the unfortunate sailor who
Was the first one in this land,
A powerful explosive charge
This lever lets me set it free
On any ship at all,
A pickle barrel at sea,
the way for the Quabbin Reservoir. As teenagers, they had danced at the final “Farewell Ball” in 1938 and remarkably danced again at the Reunion Ball in April, 2013. I wrote this song in memory of the families who once lived in the Swift River Valley from the 1600s through the mid-20th centuries, and in honor of those who remain to keep their history and their extraordinary sacrifice alive.

Visit The Friends of Quabbin at www.friendsofquabbin.org.

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In the summer of nineteen and thirty eight
Here where the Swift River ran
Boston needed more water,
And the bundled up timbers
To the villages still we recall.

CHORUS
The first time in my life
When we were older
I stumbled for something to say.
Youth is the gift
And I’m not sure what the story should end?

CHORUS
A stroke of the clock
When we were little
Is this how a story should end?

CHORUS
A stroke of the clock
At the end of the ball
When the moment for folks to move on...

So lay-up, lay-up your sailing ships,
Young and old the sailors of the ‘Catherine Doyle’
When our sails are set
And we make our course
To the winds and the rain and snow.

Here where the Swift River ran
So we’re leaving our homes
Is this how a story should end?

CHORUS
The first time in my life
And memory the things you can’t find.
You must save your life
Time all the things
And the very same moon
In the wind and the rain and snow.

When we were little
And you were the loveliest girl
We raised families in homes
And I’m not sure what the story should end?

CHORUS
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I stumbled for something to say:
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All words and music written and performed by Larry Kaplan
on acoustic and classical guitar, banjo, harmonica

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to Hannah, and as always, to Nora.

This recording is in memory of Sandy Paton, Co-Founder of
Folk Legacy Records, Inc., Sharon, CT.

Visit Larry on Facebook and www.LarryKaplanmusic.com
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All recordings are available on iTunes

Note: The original lyrics included here represent the original copyrighted material.
The singing may be slightly different. This often happens...perhaps as it should! (L.K.)