



# A Child At War

**1939 - 1945**

**A True Story of Collateral Damage**

*By Larry Westland CBE*

*“Our lives pass from us like the wind, and why  
Should wise men grieve to know that they must die?”  
**Ferdowsi***

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*“In this work I have tried to reflect the pain of war away from the battlefield and the long term damage suffered by many of the 1.5 million children who were sent, unaccompanied by their parents, to live with strangers.” Larry Westland CBE*

Larry Westland CBE was born in London in 1937. Two years later the Second War began and his experiences during that conflagration have coloured and influenced his life to this day.

He is largely self-educated and founded the world-renowned charity Music for Youth in 1971. It is now the largest music festival of its kind in the world.

His early involvement in music included working with artistes such as David Oistrakh, Duke Ellington, Manitas de Plata, Kris Kristofferson, Judy Collins, Don McLean, Shirley Bassey and Nana Mouskouri.

He was appointed Commander of the British Empire for his services to music and education by H .M. Queen Elizabeth in 1991.

*Five minutes to cross fifty years of a dry river with spectres of dead mornings on each bank. Who is in the shadows now that I have left the space that marked the granite step? I look back at the children in their ragbags, toy tanks and lost designs. We dredged for dreams in our father's empty pockets but he had gone away to war. Scabbed and torn by strangers we cried in the fathomless nights for their comfort.*

*"I put my hand into the slow sands of backyard memories and bring out the wash of times past and pastimes of no account. The guardians have left their posts and the wardens are disjointed in the blocked gutter of my untidy mind. Turn your face to the wall my boy and keep the watch that holds your mother at the door. How many times did I drown in my mother's tears and fall bleeding into tomorrow?*

*And so my father abandoned by fate, another bastard on the street of martyrs. I breathed the long nights of his ritual dying unheralded by the dawn of ignorance. He came into the world, puked and went out through the small door of saints. His legacy lay tortured by time but limped on through the backyard of my mother's dreams. Then Mars came and hell kept its promise. Death came in short cycles of light and shade on blank hillsides of numbers caught in flight. Was I the white storm of an unmade soul falling into the unloved abyss of fear?"*

*Were there beggars in the square when I was born? The fires of the vanquished burned in the silence of my father's dreams.*

### Across The Distance

I carried the memories  
Across the distance of damaged years  
Played the scars that never healed  
And saw the hurt in the dead child's face

I looked through the cracked mirror  
At the dark wall sheltered from the light  
And in those frightened nights of fear  
I saw my father board the ship of death

How I longed for the siren  
And the sky-high bilious raiders  
The shelter, rats and cold tea  
To be safe in the danger of home

All the colourless flowers  
And faceless trees of my lonely nights  
Mourned for my stillborn childhood  
Undone by absence and my mother's tears

Now, becalmed by tides of time  
An unbrokered peace comes from the thrall  
Stills the echoes of my fears  
And leaves me mindful of wounds undressed

*To My Brother Richard*

### **After Your Father**

After your father  
You took your first step;  
The moon made way  
As bombs fell around you  
You walked with tyranny,  
    Took up arms  
With no-one to guide your cause,  
    Stumbled but never fell  
No guardian took your hand –  
    Still the young warrior  
    The unnamed battle

You found a poet and a rainbow  
    And all your losses,  
    All your secrets  
Shared in the long night  
    On your hill  
    Brought me out  
    Of darkness  
We shared a moment  
    Of our dreams

My life is held in a tear  
    As I see you now  
    Walking tall,  
    You on your hill,  
    Me on mine

It is the same hill -  
    We are not alone  
    Anymore....  
    More, yes  
    There is more;  
    I love you  
    After our father.

## **Dear America**

I share your sadness

I never knew your shore to shore

Or your God Bless America

But I know you now and all the tears

I ever shed are a river to your dreams

You never blamed your deeds or your infamy

Your child grew in innocence but you gave hope

To impossible dreams.

I love you America. Be strong and make the right choice

Don't ask me why

Larry Westland – an Englishman

PS I'm in a New World state of mind.

## **Brother's Wisdom**

Lighten up indeed -  
I held the taper  
On three continents  
When Gods burned  
On distant stakes  
And hell called the morning

Sun burned the shadow  
Of all regrets and fears  
And souls perfidious  
Called to take the body  
Of the dying frame of truth  
From the heart of my heart

When, I asked, was I wanting  
In truth and understanding  
Of the long walk into the night  
That stood between me  
And the crying nymphs standing  
At all three corners of the world

Where the abdominal cries  
Of pitch-forked saints lay  
Deep in the lake of forgetfulness  
Drowning both sorrow and joy  
Did I not cry on Athena's breast  
For the cold comfort of my dawning?

I rose up from the last day of life  
And saw truth in the time  
That suffered death and solace  
In a world that lay deep in forgetfulness  
And heard the deep roar of tomorrow  
Denying the day of retribution

## **The Four Walls of Fear**

It was odd at first  
Sleeping into the past  
Through dread of morrow  
And the music of War

Waking on mother's milk  
In the cold mirror  
Of dark hearted fools  
The pain was conscious

Reflections grew deeper  
In the corner of the womb  
And shone a dark threat  
Across my weakening soul

The memories grew louder  
As the Devil led the dance  
Of demons across my loins  
And hope died in the flood of dawn

A hollow bell tolls for chaos  
Fear walks with my shadow  
As I tread the final pathway  
Into oblivion and final exile

## **The Word**

In the beginning there was the sign  
That truth, in its distorted pain, failed  
All those who came before the word  
And shielded the unformed gene  
From the licence of death's rupture  
And the silence of unknown dreams.

All the tomorrows and broken days  
Stood at the gate of time stood still  
To wait for the child of life to come  
To the door that was closed to time  
And the life- long waking yesterdays  
Found solace in the dying wind  
That began its journey in the dark.

## Chance

Fate like fear is a still born companion  
Weighing hope against the future  
While the waking night of the unsung dawn  
Unfolds the capricious dream

Blank with the days gone to blind voices  
Charity walks with the last silence  
Before the sun sinks in the unfeeling sea  
And never wakes again to the morning

So walk I in the blank days of my caprice  
Fearing only myself and my child  
Who calls me to share his determined fate  
Without the words to find his fear and mine

## **City Secrets**

Tell your city secrets to the ingrained  
Street of poets where one-eyed children  
Whisper their father's little dreams  
In torn pockets of the roadside

The little sisters fall through pavements  
Edged on by loss of their mothers  
Like the unread wallpaper stories of tales  
By the dead writer hanging on the line

The city scans the buried dreams  
Of its orphaned and fearful issue  
Voicing their silent fears by bedsides  
Left unmade and divorced from love

## **ONLY TIME.....**

Only time separates me now  
From the forgiveness I seek  
In the toppled graves of night  
And waning memories of doom  
So the search for absolution  
Wakes the wanting morning heart  
And brings no absolution  
No closer to redemption

Only time divides the answer  
From the unasked question

## Drowning

Still in the dark void  
The granite virgin  
Dances on a star  
In the long-dead sky

Prayers are being said  
For the apostle  
Drowned in the white bone  
Of the sea-blind sailor

Long before Morning  
Death breaks its promise  
And steals away time's  
Lost and promised dream

The half-formed child cries  
In the lost valley  
Mothered by Serpents  
On the broken wheel

Stone-washed morning light  
Falls on the rotting seed  
Of times before today  
And dies on the blind moon

The dark mother wails  
On the morning wind  
For her moonswept child  
Drowned in the distant seas

## **NO LONGER VICTIM**

Slotted in comfortably  
In a sea of interests  
Outside of normal  
Centered in self

I lived at the middle  
Of the picture  
Negatives flattering  
Reasons to be

Forced fed by memory  
And dark mornings  
No need to be there  
Dressed in the past

I breakfasted with  
Doom laden childhood  
Set square geometrical  
Guilt and anger

Pitted child against adult  
Still overburdened  
As dark years passed  
Into grown up darkness

Now blind to reason  
In embrace of light  
I give life to child's tears  
Build habits scorned by use and time

## **Shared Loss**

Break the news gently  
To the forlorn friend  
And unlock the dream  
Of your brief goodbye

Draw the last curtain  
Our hearts still hold you

But you are not where  
Our hands should touch you

The stones are crying  
But all the waiting  
And all the longing  
Will not call you back

The love we hold for you  
Will not wither nor fade  
As we draw the curtain  
Our hearts still hold you

## **Death**

Severance is the debt you owed life  
No cloud shall shadow your being  
Nor shall the innocence of your regret  
Leave you without an anthem  
To the pain of love

There lost, there remembered  
Sheltered in the pain and joy of love  
Severed before the call of time  
But still standing in the joy of memory  
Living still in the hearts  
Of those who knew and loved her

There is never a Goodbye

## Mother Visions

I walked across the shadows  
Heard the smiles and dark laughter  
    Of the lies and dreams of life  
    That lay bleeding in her dreams

Even when I closed my eyes  
The pointless memories called  
    Me to witness her dead tears  
    That spun away my childhood

What use that my Mother passed  
    Away with the daily tide  
    So far into her drowning  
She cleaved sharp her undone child?

What use the promised love song  
The milk, breast and hand of love  
    That gave life to the new child  
    Lost in the lifespan of time?

Shall I then walk in the shade  
    Of her forgotten promise  
    Or by some will of mine own  
Find the child who should have been

## Out of the Dark

The road out of loss  
Is long and shadowed  
By grief and longing  
The way through darkness  
Is the travellers fear  
Untrod ways are lined  
With questions dulled  
By the blind dreamer  
And drowned in remorse

As the toll of wanting  
Fails the unspoken dream  
Only then when we fall  
Do we begin to rise  
And see the way forward  
To the unborn truth that  
Comes with enlightenment  
Only then through all the pain  
Comes the revelation  
That all along the answer  
Was within, but only the dark  
Road could lead me there  
To you

## The Wall of Fear

We stumbled through the cold winds of chance  
Blowing fierce curses on the wall of fear  
We shadowed the split mind of broken dreams  
Finding no answers here in the dark asylum  
No answers to allay the deep and darkening  
Horror of tomorrows days and yesterdays nights

Undone by the night ghosts of memory we fell  
Into the path of the little known secrets of scientists  
Who measured our fears and gauged our outcomes  
Formulating medicines to allay understanding  
And committing us to the eternal gloom of dependence  
We screamed for resolution and were drowned in Panacea

## The Journey

There, poised between youth and age  
    You stand revealed  
        A life, thought out and  
            Attained  
Each day as vulnerable as a lamb

How many mothers  
    Stood their ground  
        To bring you through  
            Your long birth?

You are complete  
    Dear friend  
        You never failed  
The love you were denied  
    Has been fulfilled  
        You are you  
And the world has taken you into its seasons

## Once Upon A Time.....

Once upon a time before the world we know was formed there walked in a hidden forest a shape between serpent and fawn. The one an unwilling monster and the other a child without wit or reason but both from the same womb. The darkness fell upon them and like two eagles they soared into the skies to find their way between the clouds. However far they flew from each other they were still intertwined, each the other's keeper and each the other's slave. So long were the years between their parting and so far the journey that they thought of themselves as one. One day in their flight they reached the top of a great mountain and looking above the clouds they saw themselves mirrored in each other's eyes. "I am you", said the one and "you am I".

They were born in a blind valley where thunder rolled down out of torn clouds. The mother's milk poisoned the angels and morning was a cloak of riven despair. She washed and clothed their mornings and watched their exit in the ebb of evening. They walked together into their own oblivion and each morning time their mother counted her dead. Lost in the dead shelters they cried for their fathers and their hopelessness. Without words or verses for the saints their feet fell on the broken promises of a God they didn't know.

All things that were built by man fell around them. Mornings, without the buried spirit, moved the shadows from them but not the fear. Through the silence came the call of their mother through the locked door. They moved in silence among the broken stream of light that dawned and fell on the faces of unborn children. The unending river joined their souls together in the circle of light flowed and returned undiminished.

## **Sing No Morning Songs**

Close the door on tomorrow  
Silence the threat of dawn  
Curse the curse of mornings  
Torn from the days to come  
Close your eyes to the future  
And sing no morning songs