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POLSK
IMMIGRATION

FRANCE
ARRIVAL

DEUTSCHLAND
GERMANY

TAXI FOR

KIEV

**THE STORY OF SIX STRANGERS,
CROSSING SIX BORDERS,
OVER SIX DAYS**



Kiev, Ukraine
1,729 miles



**Anfield Football
Stadium**
15 yards



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Contents

Introduction	9
1. The Planning	14
2. Indigenous Reds	21
3. The Money Men	32
4. Technophobe	38
5. The Travelling Companions.	41
6. The Artful Dodgers	51
7. Scouse Connections	57
8. The Leaving of Liverpool	67
9. Leave With Ease	74
10. Sunnier Climes.	79
11. This Ain't The F*****g Nürburgring	84
12. Hotel Walton	92
13. Memories Of Old Kyiv.	108
14. Bristol Beauts	111
15. Don't Buy <i>The S*n</i>	116
16. The Greatest Man I Ever Met	119
17. 200 Yards In Five Hours	123
18. Welcome To Ukraine	131
19. Shevchenko Park	139
20. The Park Paraffin.	148
21. This Is What We Came For	152
22. D'akuju Kyiv	162
23. Walking The Cow	166
24. Return To Wrocław (Where the f**k is Jamie?)	173
25. Indecent Proposal.	180
26. Toilet Slaughterhouse	194
27. Deathbahns	200
28. Handtwerp	204
29. Homeward-Bound	208
30. Merseyside United	215
Acknowledgements	220

The Planning

THE WEEK building up to the 2018 final of the greatest competition in European club football was one of real mixed emotions for Donna and I, plus thousands and thousands of other Redmen. The want and the need to be there in Kyiv was at times overwhelming. There were stories aplenty of family, friends and colleagues booking trips left, right and centre and this only served to make the quest to be there even more desperate.

We had spent countless hours on many different websites trying to find a reasonably priced excursion to the Ukrainian capital. Hopes were raised and then dashed on numerous occasions; one minute excited that we could get there and the next disappointed because of places being filled up at an alarmingly rapid pace and also because of the spiralling costs involved. We had stayed up into the wee small hours of the Wednesday morning prior to the game, researching avenues that could possibly get us on the move to yet another European Cup Final. The event is better known as the

Champions League Final these days, although locally this enormous cup is known as 'Old Big Ears'. It always has been and always will be.

Our planning may have been a little late and a bit too close to the day of the game itself to expect flights to still be available, but as the big day drew closer and closer the desire to be there in Kyiv was becoming all-consuming. The fact that two of the city's most collectable items had landed at our feet had made our research even more desperate. A source that will forever remain anonymous had offered me two tickets for the final, all above board I must add and at face value, absolutely no touting involved here. Just an amazing act of thoughtfulness that will be appreciated forever. Sir, I owe you a debt of gratitude! The value of the two tickets I had been offered was €280, and these were nowhere near the top-price seats on sale.

The whole football circus is designed to fleece. Tourists will undoubtedly pay the going rate and locals feel a duty/need to be there. This not only maintains demand but increases it to astronomical levels. Liverpool Football Club turn away on average 20,000 unsuccessful ticket applications for every home league match. I rest my case!

Many years ago, after getting stung once by a ticket tout, it was there and then that I promised myself never again to allow myself to be ripped off by these people. In 1976 and only a month before my 15th birthday I had gone down to Wembley by coach with my elder brother Paul. With no match ticket in my pocket for the Charity Shield against Southampton, just before kick-off I found myself with no alternative but to pay one of the Cockney spiv arseholes £18. That was triple

the face-value cost, gobshite! I've never had a ticket off a tout since and nor will I ever again. I'd rather miss the game than line the pockets of an entrepreneur with few morals.

Back to 2018 and after hours and hours of trawling the internet, it was with huge disappointment that we resigned ourselves to not being able to make it this time. I don't think either of us slept well that night, constantly going over and over in our minds the options, if any, that were possible. The missed opportunity was starting to sting already. My overriding thoughts were that as the big day drew closer the desire and the agony of missing out would become almost unbearable, especially after not being in Istanbul; we will never get over that one!

I was still in the same frame of mind when we were driving to work the following day. It was the Wednesday morning, four days before the big game itself. During our commute, Donna made a phone call to someone unknown to me, and after she had finished she turned to me and said, 'Okay, you're going tonight – by taxi.' 'WHAT?' I exclaimed, astonished by her words. 'One of the lads from work had texted me the details of a taxi firm that were running a trip,' she said calmly.

My head was spinning; this was all happening so fast and before I could gather my thoughts and respond Donna continued, 'You're going to have to finish work early today, go home, pack and be back at Anfield by 6pm tonight!' What a girl.

My head was all over the place. My emotions were going into overdrive; excitement, sadness, happiness, disappointment, selfishness, in fact almost every emotion you could think of was racing through my head. I was really uneasy about it all

as Donna had gone to all this trouble to enable me to go on this huge road trip alone. She was sacrificing one of her own ambitions but was determined to make sure that I got to go.

Donna knew only too well that the last option of travelling was to be on my own, or without her at least. This was the only option that was on the table as time was running out fast, albeit it was not my preferred choice I must add. I know Donna wasn't too comfortable with this mode of transport for a couple of reasons. Firstly, she doesn't travel too well; she tends to get car sick unless she is sat up front or driving. The poor girl even gets seasick on the Mersey Ferry.

Sadly, the real reason for Donna not wanting to do a road trip of this huge proportion was the heartbreaking fact that when she was a five-year-old girl and the apple of her father Maurice Robinson's eye, Donna and her family were to experience the most tragic of all tragic events, which would change people's lives forever, and not in a good way.

Maurice was in a top Liverpool band that went by the name of The Hoedowners. They were hugely successful in the 1960s and bookings were coming in from near and far. One such booking ultimately turned out to be their last gig and heartbreakingly proved fatal.

The Hoedowners were on a mammoth road trip themselves, heading to Turkey to entertain the troops stationed overseas. After such a long and arduous trip, the band were involved in a major road traffic accident only one hour away from their destination. Maurice and two other members of the band tragically died at the scene. The lead singer was a young lady named Prudence White, who was on her very first trip with the band; she lost her life on her debut tour at 21 years old.

The indie band Viola Beach's accident in Sweden in 2016 was strikingly similar and a very loud echo of the heartache Donna and her family had suffered back in 1970. That heartache never truly leaves you. Time may fade and dilute things a little but these momentous, life-changing experiences can never go away. Just how does a five-year-old girl who idolised her daddy ever get over something like that? I sincerely doubt she ever has, to tell you the truth, or that she ever will, not fully. How could she?

Donna has had a massive void in her life for almost 50 years. No matter how many other family members and friends have attempted to fill it, that void has never gone away. Mo is never forgotten within the circles of the family and even further afield within the city of Liverpool. He is remembered and mentioned at all family gatherings.

As I said, 'What a girl!'

The rest of the morning at work was a complete blur. I rather sheepishly explained to my boss that I needed not only to finish work early that day but would also be missing for the next six days. I can only hold my hands up and say fair play to him as he was extremely understanding to say the least, given my late notification. He is a football man and fully understood the opportunity that had presented itself to me. He knew full well that when these chances in life present themselves, then you have got to grab hold of them and go for it.

Lunchtime arrived and I was off, back home to pack clobber for the trip along with toiletries, credit cards and cash. I just grabbed some of my clothes and stuffed them into the biggest holdall that I could find. I later realised to my horror

that the one and only towel I had actually packed turned out to be one of the small hand towels that are exactly what they say on the tin; I had a towel for my hands for five days! What a start, and no wonder Donna insists on packing whenever we manage to get away somewhere.

I thought I had all bases covered so off I went back to work to say bye to my beloved and our colleagues. I would be lying if I said that I wasn't chuffed to bits with the fact that I was going on yet another great European adventure, but the feeling was also underlined with a big sense of guilt along with a huge pang of selfishness.

I strode back in to work with a subdued smile on my face. Donna was sat at the reception desk along with a couple of colleagues. As I approached the desk she looked up and delivered a huge bollocking and gave the impression that she wasn't too bothered who was around and could hear it either. Completely unprofessional and so out of character, not forgetting that this was a little embarrassing from my point of view.

The bollocking was aimed at me. In my haste to get ready I had only gone and picked up the wrong holdall, which had been given to her as a present by one of our daughters. It wasn't exactly a feminine sort of bag, it was just the biggest we had. I wasn't overly impressed by her rant, especially as it was delivered in front of our work-mates, but thankfully the slap around my legs didn't register with them too much. It's difficult to explain really but each and every time we know we are going to be apart, petty squabbles ensue.

In all the time we have been together we are lucky to say that we've had maybe three or four major arguments. For what

it's worth, that is four too many as far as I'm concerned. It's impossible to believe but Donna and I almost never argue. Our kids will vouch for that. But I think the tensions of the upcoming trip and the thought of being apart had surfaced slightly that afternoon. She really was worried about the length of the journey that I was about to embark on.

Donna had done her very best to disguise it; after all she had coerced me into going, but looking back the poor girl must have been going through hell. My mixed emotions of the day could only have paled into insignificance in comparison to what she was feeling. Her mind must have been all over the place. What she was about to endure mentally throughout the next six days and nights, one can only imagine. I at least had other things and other people to help occupy my mind. I was going to be kept entertained on my latest great adventure with another European Cup Final destiny to look forward to. Donna only had the normal, run-of-the-mill things to keep her occupied while I was away.