

Dear Young Person,

Hello, what a lovely opportunity to write to you about one of my childhood experiences. This was brought back to my memory a couple of weeks ago when I was on a lockdown walk exploring my local environment. I enjoy going in new places and seeing things I haven't seen before and although this walk wasn't entirely new to me, it was over 30 years since I had last been there.

So there I was strolling along the Thames pathway near the Thames Barrier marvelling at its engineering and trying to work out just how it works when I came across a sorry sight. Just ahead I could see a decaying, rusty, old ferry boat, tilting and slowly submerging into the mud and slime of the River Thames, she looked so lost and forlorn. As I got closer, I saw it's name 'The Royal Iris' and I was immediately transported back, over 60 years. I had seen and been on this boat many times, not here on the River Thames but on the River Mersey, back in my hometown of Liverpool.

The Royal Iris was a floating icon on the River Mersey, part of the ferry fleet which crossed the River to and fro from the Pierhead in Liverpool to the Wirral. She stood out and was more like a yellow submarine back in the 1950s with her banana yellow and green paintwork (this was changed to a sparkling white and blue in the 1970s). She was the largest of the ferries having a ballroom, restaurant and its own fish and chip shop on board. Coincidentally she arrived in Liverpool the year I was born 1951.

My memories took me back to summer day trips across the River Mersey to the seaside town, New Brighton, which was frequented by many Liverpudlians. My mum and dad didn't have a car so our adventure would begin with a bus or sometimes a tram ride to the Pierhead where we would join hundreds of others who also had the same idea. ...the Royal Iris could carry over 2000 passengers and when the sun shone she often did, packing us in like sardines. Oddly enough, like everyone else we always wore our Sunday best clothes. We had our elasticated swim suits in our duffle bags, along with a bucket, spade, fishing net and not forgetting our jam butties and sherbet lemonade.

My brother and I would race down the floating landing stage, hoping it would be the Royal Iris. We would try and get a seat near the front on the upper deck, climbing the narrow steep stairs, so we could watch the Liverpool waterfront pass by as we sailed towards the mouth of the river before it merged into the Irish Sea via Liverpool Bay. My mum would say 'breathe in the sea air', at times took our breathe away as the sea breeze whistled through our hair. If we were lucky we would glimpse some of the larger ships coming into and leaving the Liverpool Docks and wonder where they sailed in from or where they were bound for. I am sure this is where my fascination for the world and wanting to travel stemmed from.

The journey time was about half an hour but it always seemed much longer and we thought we were sailing for miles and miles, fortunately for me these were usually calm crossings as I am not a good sailor. We were excited to be on the ferry and of course we were anticipating the day ahead... building sandcastles, scouring rock pools, laughing at Punch and Judy, riding on a donkey and paddling in the squelching sands of the River Mersey whilst our mum and dad would sit in their deck chairs.

As our day came to an end, sunburnt and tired we would make our way back to New Brighton Pier with many more day trippers heading back to Liverpool. There was always a sense of anticipation would the ferry be able to dock at the Pier because the River Mersey has a high tidal range and sometimes when it was very low tide we had to wait for this to rise up before the ferry could dock otherwise we would have all been well and truly stuck in the Mersey mud. Once homeward bound we would look out for the Liverbirds standing on top of the majestic Liver Buildings welcoming us back. The Royal Iris berthed with a bump and a bang, the ropes were tied, we disembarked and trudged up the gang planks ...until the next time.

It was sad to see this once magical ferry, that had sailed so regally and was loved by thousands of day trippers who she carried across the River Mersey. She had inspired Gerry and The Pacemakers to write a famous song 'Ferry across the Mersey' and The Beatles had performed in her ballroom but now she was slumped and slowly sinking into the River Thames with seemingly nobody to care for her....but her glory days remain firmly in my happy memories.

I wish you well with this exciting project, enjoy your learning and have fun.

Stay safe and stay happy.

Best Wishes Ann



The Royal Iris in the River Thames
Near the Thames Barrier,
Woolwich . 2020

The Royal Iris sailing across
River Mersey
Her iconic banana yellow and
green paintwork of 1950s and
1960s



All aboard The Royal Iris
Daytrippers leaving the Pierhead,
Liverpool to sail down the River
Mersey to New Brighton 1950s

The Royal Iris with her new
Paintwork 1970s sailing in
front of the majestic Liver
Buildings with the Liverbirds.

