

The Finn Lyrics Interpretation Manual

as of October 6, 2001
(Turn And Run modified)

After almost three years of constant growth the FLIM has gone into animated suspension in mid-1999 by request of a valued person with definite authority on the matter (guess who?).

The FLIM had been created in August 1996 to supply you with expected and unexpected interpretation ideas for songs penned by Tim and Neil Finn together and alone (that includes Split Enz and Crowded House songs). It is my belief that any of these ideas can help you find your own access to the fascinating diversity that is to be found in the lyrics from the Brothers Finn.



Finn says he prefers to leave his lyrics to individual interpretation, although he knows some who go too far. "Apparently there's a website, I haven't seen it, where people discuss my lyrics. I'll have to have a look some time, because it's pretty hilarious," he says.

Saturday Adelaide Advertiser (June 27, 1998)

You do not need to change your own opinions and insights after reading the ones collected here, but between grinning and finding new angles you can have a pretty good time. A perfect example of what I mean by that (and what the FLIP is all about) is the truly brilliant reading of Something So Strong by Colleen Mataan. All the information below is strictly subjective and unofficial (except where noted), so any harm that comes to you by

using this database is your own fault (add the rest of the usual disclaimers here). This page is NOT complete, and never will be. Very occasionally a few additional hints of value will be added, be it to new or old songs.

Feel free to distribute this file unaltered to other Frenz. Thanks go out to all those who have contributed to the FLIM over the years. If you liked this, leave an entry in the Finnatics guestbook at <http://www.finnatics.de/>

All I Ask

Insight into "All I Ask" from Q 70 - July 1992:

Tim: "Even though Neil was distracted because his wife was expecting their 2nd baby, and I was a bit deflated after finishing a solo album, we got going so well that there's a track called All I Ask which literally took as long to write as it does to sing. It just came straight out on to tape. But that sort of thing happening made us think we should go on doing it forever, meaning it was a good idea for me to join Crowded House. It was a bit of an over-reaction as it turned out."

Angel's Heap

was written inspired by a painting by Jenny Watson (owned by Tim). The painting ended up on the cover of the two CD-singles for that song. Thanks to Cybele Leverett, there is more to that story (from the Finn US tour):

Tim said this song was about a babysitter that they had had as a child and a ride she took them on. Neil (who was six at the time) claims to have no memory, or rather a suppressed memory about this event (which was implied to be a sexual experience for Tim) and that Tim threatened him if he ever spoke of it (somewhat jokingly). They joked about how if they kept playing this song Neil would eventually remember what happened and then they said something about Tim's buttocks. A few nights later Tim stressed this song was about a babysitter "they might have once had". But Neil ruined it for him by mentioning the buttocks again... It was all very playful, but there seemed to be truth to the adventure.

This is quite consistent with the video for that song...

Anyone Can Tell

I dream of a place that's hedged with roses / With a man in the middle don't talk in riddles / You get hung on every single word... I somehow get the impression this song was written about Neil's time in Split Enz. Reason? The "place hedged with roses" could point to the opening line of "Walking Down A Road", and the refrain sounds really similar to the one in "I Got You", doesn't it? As for the entire rest... you figure it out... ;-)

As Sure As I Am

This could be a song about interracial love. On the other hand, it could also have been written based on Neil's impressions on his African tour. Maybe both?

Astro

- ◆ *At the show I went to at Deep Ellum Live, Dallas, Neil introduced "Astro" as being "a song about witnessing your own funeral". I hadn't thought of it that way before -- I thought maybe it was about someone talking to a closeted gay loved one -- but I definitely can see it now, wrote Angie.*
- ◆ *The following view was sent to me from Jaime Latarte: "Astro" makes me think of someone with an STD, especially the line "The thing that gets to me is how you're never free/ how the spirit yearns, your body is a prison". It seems as though this person isn't able to "get any" because of their disease (ie their "body is a prison") but "the spirit yearns". More so the line "There'll be no compromise when all you want is wrapped around you", assuming that "all you want" is the man/woman of your dreams; there'll be no compromise if the disease is passed on to them, and the rest of the song "no saints preserve us when we're dying / to pick us up from where we're lying" implies to me that there is no cure for this disease.*

Black & White Boy

Although all speculations about Paul Hester (or Michael Jackson ;-)) might be valid, the song obviously had been written about Lester, Neil's Dalmatian dog (actually, the second song with this dog as a subject: „Lester Lives“ is an unreleased song about an accident when the same dog had been run over by a car).

Bullets In My Hairdo

This Finn Brothers song was written about "shopping in a war zone" - at least, that was how the brothers frequently announced the song on their 1995 tour. Jonathan Kinsey wrote: I reckon that Bullets in my Hairdo could be a lament to the situation in Ireland in 1995. References to bombs and snipers seem to bear that out. Also, it was written around the time when shop bombings were common in the main cities of Ireland which would explain why the "shopping is a curse"

Catherine Wheels

Many different interpretations exist about this song. Most of these center around an abused woman about to walk away from her torturer. At the Fleadh/Finsbury Park gig in June 1994 Neil called this "a fantasy about the breakup of a very twisted affair", thus confirming this idea. It has even been suggested that this "breakup" occurred when she committed suicide... BTW, a "Catherine Wheel" is a firework in a wheel that you nail into a post or into the ground before lighting it. The firework makes the wheel spin very fast, spraying out sparks in all directions. The *origin* of the term Catherine Wheel is probably the nails-enforced wheel in the time of the witch hunts used to tie people onto and roll them down a hill, thus killing them.

Charlie

The fandom in general agrees about one thing - from the personal view of the writer this is very likely about the band Split Enz in its critical period when Phil Judd left in 1977. Putting all insider knowledge aside, what remains unclear is whether this sad tale about one person with violent tendencies discovering its dead mate is about a male/female, male/male or female/female relationship.

The Climber

Neil has recently explained the origin of the song: two years ago a team of insufficiently prepared mountain climbers had tried to master Mount Everest and eventually got stuck on a high camp in the mountain wall with no hope of rescue. AFAIK at a point it was so certain that rescue attempts would fail that a communication chain between the climbers' radio and a home telephone was set up, so that one of the climbers could talk to his wife and decide on a name for their unborn son before he died. The incident is captured in the „Mount Everest“ IMAX film quite by accident. Neil had heard of the story and used images of it as a template for this song.

Convent Girls

Obviously written at a time when Mr. Finn clearly had a thing for "historical" songs (Dr. Livingston being a good example), I have images of the US founding years in the 17th century all over this one in my head. A strange atmosphere lurks over this beautiful song, fears of oppression, melancholy, maybe the wish to have lived in another time.

Distant Sun

- ◆ This is just my idea, but the song might be about Neil's feelings towards his (concert) audience.
- ◆ I've received a different opinion stating the song might be about a little child looking at its father who is a smoker (the dust from a distant sun are the ashes from a cigarette).
- ◆ Another quote states that Neil had written this about the believers in astrology.
- ◆ Here is a fourth idea, quoting Andie from Canada: *Maybe I'm just using this to deal with my post-travelling blues, but this song hits me as one about growing up and going out to see a bit of our small world and how we are all affected by certain things, no matter what culture or geography we originate from. You can be gripped by homesickness and loneliness or whatever on a trip to the store down the block, or you can find a place you'd swear you never found before and feel right at home. 'Cause basically we're all alot alike, right?*
- ◆ The part about growing up can also be seen in one detailed interpretation from Ignatius Tse, who explained on the TONGUE IN THE MAIL list that this song might be a dialogue between father and son, not unlike - but more subtle - the one in the eponymous song by Cat Stevens.

Don't Dream It's Over

- ◆ This is not standard procedure, but I had to quote this one (from Q's Reader's Poll Top 100 singles of all time - this was #66): *Melancholy bliss. Decamping from Oz to LA post Split Enz, Neil Finn aspired to write "simple romantic songs wearing their bitterness on the inside". DDIO nailed it. The lyric is a patchwork of confusion, defiance, love under threat. Warm harmonies drop out to leave Finn alone, aching with fear in his knowledge of beauty. As he suggests "There's nothing tougher than a good tune".*
- ◆ From Q #118: *This song sounds at first like Us against The World fare, until you realise the narrator is lying to himself.*
- ◆ One MOJO quote has it that Neil had written this song while groveling after a, say, disagreement with his wife.

Dr. Livingston

This song for the ill-fated "Woodface I" record was obviously inspired by Neil's visit to Africa in 1989 (?) (see also As Sure As I Am). A rather straightforward song about the inability of completely understanding foreign cultures (you never would have guessed that, would you?).

Fingers Of Love

- ◆ David Weil has a quote about this song where Neil talks about *being in Jamaica during a break in the Woodface tour and listening to the crickets, which he said had a magical quality to them. Then, as he sat on the beach, wrote the song to an incredible sunset. Hence, "fingers of love" take on a more spiritual quality (sunbeams from heaven "moving down") than the old hands in the pants routine that you expect if you don't know the origin of the song. There's a bit of the old double meaning in there as well. Also the video bears it out because as he sings those lines "your hands reach down to comfort me", he adopts a sort of supplicating or praying pose.*
- ◆ Dan Eliot sees Fingers Of Love in a similar yet different light: *I have always had a fascination with a particular section of "Fingers Of Love". In particular, the line "Colour is it's own reward". I have interpreted this line to be about environmentalism, more specifically the protection of endangered species. Often, people justify environmentalism by discussing how much the other life forms on earth are "worth to humans". That is, protection of endangered species should be justified in terms of "economic benefit" to us. But to me (by way of Neil's words), the simple fact that we share the earth with other life is its reward enough! Their simple presence is a reward and we should not need further justification to protect them... hence the line "color is its own reward".*
- ◆ Amanda Harris has sent me a musician's interpretation: *I kinda thought it was a love song about his guitar. Less specifically about a love affair with music. "and the sound that comes to carry me across the land and over the sea..." referring to touring. "Fingers of love move down" could refer to the movement of one's hands on their guitar. "I can't look up" I personally often find when I am writing songs on my guitar that I can't look up--but then again, I'm not a great guitar player. Then there is "...the chiming of a perfect chord..." I guess I don't have to explain that one. So, when I listen to that song, that is what I think of and that is what it means to me. Now, I think that a lot of people would not like to think of this song this way because a love affair with a musical instrument is hard to understand unless you have one yourself. I am not in love with my guitar, but my husband holds onto his like it is a beautiful woman. I sometimes joke with him that he loves that thing more than me. Funny he never disagrees with that statement either...*

Four Seasons In One Day

- ◆ A favourite interpretation among those who delve deeper into the mystics of these lyrics is the idea that this song has been written towards the personality of Nick Seymour. Since we all know that Crowded House's bass player usually was responsible for the "look" and stage design of the band, there could be some truth to that. However, in the NDR interviews around June 6, 1996, Neil confirmed the idea that this song had been written about Melbourne, a city about which somebody once said "If you do not like the weather, sit down and have a beer. Most likely the weather you had been looking for will be around before you finish".
- ◆ A reader of this page had a different idea: to her the song deals with the way the mood of someone can change in the course of one day. In fact, while the first half of the song might largely be focused on the said city, the second half gets increasingly personal. The Domain however is the name of a legendary park both in the cities of Melbourne and Auckland...

Hard Act To Follow

Colleen Mattan wrote the following which I quote: *Although in "Stranger Than Fiction" Mike Chunn says 'Hard Act To Follow' was an almost humorous piece of irony, as if Tim was [sic] trying to cut expectation of their new album by making a joke out of it. There was certainly a feeling that even with the huge success they now enjoyed, it wouldn't take long for the sense of joy and satisfaction to slide away as other factors came into play." I have to say that I can't see this song as being more than just a passing reference to Tim's emotional state at the time. I say this because Tim's songs about The Big Issues of his life are wrenchingly honest. Think about "I Hope I Never" just for a second. Or "Charlie." Or "Haul Away." Instead, the show biz metaphors in HATF are more related to older Enz songs like "Matinee Idyll" or goofy love songs like "The Woman Who Loves You" or "Amy (Darling)" or more rueful love songs like "My Mistake" or "Another Great Divide." When Tim is upset over something, he lays it on the line. I think HATF is a charming and witty love song--just as we expect from the Enz--but I would not consider it a barometer of Tim's psyche.*

Hit The Ground Running

Courtesy of Janet Storm comes this opinion: *Regarding Tim's "Hit The Ground Running" - just a thought, but Tim sounds like he is talking about his departure from Crowded House. And Shelley Wood gave me this alternative: The lines about "His graffiti/filled the subway..." and the later lines about "Deadly virus/so few survivors.." always put me in mind of Keith Haring, the subway graffiti artist who died of AIDS. I'd assumed this song was a tribute to him.*

Hole In The River

Thanks, Jon-Paul, for sending me this: *Like John Lennon, to whom he has also been compared, Neil's songwriting can be triggered by the most unlikely things. Such as in the case of Hole in the River. "I'd seen a Shirley MacLaine movie where she'd threatened to commit suicide. She says "I'm going to throw myself off a bridge and make a hole in the river". The next day I was told that a member of the family in NZ had committed suicide and that phrase immediately sprang back. I wrote the song as a response to hearing that news. When you come across news like that you just think about the sort of emotions that churned inside to make that person take such an extreme step."*

How Will You Go

Another example for the mind-boggling abilities of the Finns to combine the "saddest and most uplifting" things. In my opinion a song to someone considering suicide as the only solution. Were it anybody else, a song with a theme like this would probably sound either depressing or preachy.

I Walk Away

This interesting song that appears on albums of both Split Enz and Crowded House (with different lyrics) can be seen both as the "intended" interpretation (separation from a lover), but also as the view of either Tim leaving Split Enz (or Neil freeing himself from Tim's towering presence). It is fun to follow the song's origin through "Love & Success" and "Your Inspiration"; each of both giving you new ways to look at its meaning.

In Love With It All

During the Finn Brothers' concert in Hamburg, the two explained that this song had been inspired by the sight of a boy on a train in Peru who had a flute with only eight notes (listen to the final bars of that song...)

In My Command

I would love / To trouble you in your time of need... of course, this *can* be read to be as sexy and delicate a song as When You Come, but just like that one Mr. Neil Finn doesn't let us have it that easily. If you read the lyrics carefully, the other interpretation I've received makes perfect sense ... being about a father striving to find the right balance between authority and love, between discipline and laissez-faire in his attitude towards his children.

In The Lowlands

A very interesting song, which has both been interpreted as

- ◆ the song of an unfaithful husband on his way back home to his wife and as
- ◆ thoughts about the situation on New Zealand after a global thermonuclear war.

Read the lyrics - both can be possible!

Instinct

Another multiple directions song.

- ◆ could be about the self-deception of a heavy smoker
- ◆ or, as an interview on June 10 in the Herald stated, about the creative problems of a certain songwriter prior to the breakup of his band: *Neil Finn has finally flicked the switch. It has taken 12 months since he penned these lyrics, but finally one of the industry's finest songwriting talents has realised the creative frustrations which have long plagued him can't be ignored. "It was a case of music imitating life," Finn mused last week as he reflected on his decision to end the 10 years of Crowded House. "After I made the decision I reread the lyrics and realised that somehow, subconsciously, I knew it was over a year ago."*
- ◆ an influence on the aforementioned decision was spotted by Helena de Bres: *Did you hear that in Enzso Sam Hunt couldn't remember where to come in on Stranger than Fiction and Neil had to turn a little light on in front of the stage to cue him? I don't know about the timing on this, but is it not a possibility that 'When your turn comes round, and the light goes on' refers to good old Sammie? It could just be an amazing (or not so) coincidence, but Neil is such a spiritual voyager that this doesn't surprise me in the slightest.*

Hmm, make up your mind...

Into Temptation

Quote from an interview with Neil Finn in MOJO, June 1994:

- ◆ Some songs are more personal than others. There wouldn't have been a problem with Into Temptation if people hadn't gone, "What's he up to? What's been going on there?" That was a song about the nature of guilt and that moment of wavering, when you decide whether to tip yourself over the edge or hang back from it. It's not a song that directly relates to an experience I was having then. But everybody's been in that situation at some time. I knew it, I wrote about it and it's awkward to talk about it. To me it's a question of once they're written it's just The Guy singing it.
- ◆ More info came to me from Mike Murray (London): *I have a recording of an interview Neil Finn recorded with BBC Radio 1 back in 1993 where he describes the inspiration as a direct experience of some observations made whilst staying in a Motel somewhere in New Zealand. Neil's fellow guests included a rugby and a netball team. As the guests mixed together in the Motel bar and the drink started to flow, slowly the rugby players started pairing up with the netball players before retiring to bed. Draw your own conclusions as to further events. I guess that those observations were the seed for the writer's thoughts to describe the feeling of guilt and the moment of wavering.*

Kill Eye

Quote Neil Finn on the "Recurring Dream" Live Disc: "And when you can't get to sleep, you always turn the telly on, don't you? And this is what you get.": a view on the ongoing self-destruction of human civilization. The quote "Please forgive me" had been taken from the "live" confession of Jimmy Swaggart (a well known Televangelist in the US) back in 1987.

King Tide

Well, let's see if we can collect more contradicting thoughts on this one than on Distant Sun!

◆ It might be that this is about Neil's conflict with his creativity, his urge to write music which he tried to lay low for a few years after the breakup. The "King Tide" herein refers to the tidal wave of creativity. Or it could be about...

“ ...what Markauskas sent me: *I think King Tide is about vampyres, or dealing with being a vampyre. I know it sounds far out but I have evidence to follow, so please be patient with my delusions. It's a dark and empty room / The sun beating hard on your door - Mr/Ms Vampyre in their shelter from the sun. Dark to keep them alive, but they know the sun is waiting to get them. Feel emotion roar within you / You're flesh and blood like anyone - The unusual rush that comes with being a vampire (I'm assuming that this is a fairly recently made one). They don't understand their condition, their physical features are all the same. Make some sense of your life / Move your hand and make the mark / I don't know why you're so confused / You're flesh and blood, there's no excuse - Trying to rationalise it, use the gift to do something productive, make the best of their condition. Or, perhaps the sire (maker, i'm obsessed with the literature, so sue me!), who is obviously a much older one, not understanding the new one's problems. slightly mocking, because the old vampyre knows that there is no way out. And the hunger inside / Won't go away it's starting to rise - The bloodlust. And the longer you hide / The more you deny The new vampyre doesn't want to drink blood or kill people. Tries to push it aside but it gets stronger. [...] I can feel the king tide coming - Since breaking the normal resolve was only the 'sea rushing in', a king tide is probably the result of all the previous repression, and/or a killing spree, perhaps. (I'm not advocating a killing spree, and I doubt Neil is, it's just my view of a vampyre's view of these lyrics.) [...] The music is also a mix of contrasts. It's dark, passionate, and loud when being a vampyre, and soft when trying to be human. I'm not saying Neil is a vampyre, or knows one personally (how would i know?). Come to think of it, most of the concerts are at night. I wonder...*

Keep thinking, it's an interesting idea!

Kiss The Road Of Rarotonga

recalls the details of an accident Tim had while riding a motorcycle on named road. The (bare-footed) nurse at the hospital told Tim he had kissed the road to Rarotonga. That was also the place where the Oceanic Anti-Nuclear Treaty was signed, but the release date being so close to the French atom bomb tests at Muturoa was probably a coincidence.

Last Day Of June

Here I may quote Andrew Burlinson: *Does anyone else think that this song might be about Paul Hester? Neil and Paul share a bond that I think very few of us understand. I've seen many band-mates refer to other band members almost in the same vein as spouses. Spending ten years together touring, recording, etc. creates a relationship that is unique and strong -- like a sibling or a lover. So I think Last Day of June is Neil's song for Paul. "The fire lights play on me / The choir ignites behind me" -- The maori choir and the log drummers joined the Together Alone tour after Paul quit, giving Neil, Nick and Mark a sort of boost. So I think these thoughts about the sadness of Paul's departure hit Neil during the post-Hester TA tour. "The rising voice of discontent / All the guardian angels / You can bang the drum / Look what we've become / I hope there might be one of us / Who calls the tune / Last day of June" -- Neil might be talking about the way Paul's discontent with the band grew as the tour progressed. "You can bang the drum" might even be taken literally, signifying Paul's growing discontent -- he doesn't play the drum, he bangs it, as if he's angry. "Look what we've become" might be Neil's assessment of the band right before Paul left-- trying to maintain an image or a status quo that had been slowly fading for months. Neil and Paul were having difficulty realizing that they were drifting apart. "I hope there might be one of us who calls the tune" is Neil's hope that maybe someday he and Paul will be able to play again like they used to, with nothing but joy. And, I might be mistaken, but didn't Paul quit in June of 1994? (actually, it was in April...) I think the lines, "who calls the tune", "who speaks the truth" and "who breaks the news" are all about Paul's no-bullshit way of dealing with things. His liveliness in gigs, his mockery of convention and finally his quitting the band show that he's a person who won't compromise.*

This one rings true, but I've heard in the meantime that this song had been written *way* before 1994. But does this mean it cannot be read that way? No, sir.

Last One Standing

This one comes from Patrick Robinson, who had the following in mind after seeing Neil and his son Liam perform together at one of the US shows: *... my wife Kim's impression seems close to the truth that this song is about Liam. Imagine Neil and Liam at home about to go out for a driving lesson... "Hand me down my favorite coat, show what you're made of, suprise us both" then the drive downtown "fly in the night" the sudden application of the brakes causing the car to spin out "bring us round".... then "our finest days have come" about Liam entering the memorable period of young adulthood and the wonderful experience of sharing that time in their relationship [...] and also feeling tremendous fatherly pride in his son's growing maturity and musical skill "And you are magnificent, and I can see you with my eyes closed" and in that vision seeing himself at his son's concert some time in the not too distant future as the "last one standing" at the end of the ovation.*

Loose Tongue

- ◆ Does any one else out there listen to "Loose Tongue" and think it's about Neil breaking up Crowded House and then being bugged by people all wanting to know why he did it and what was he thinking? The most obvious proof of this song being about Crowded House are the lines The house is falling down because of my loose tongue and in Neil's ramblings towards the end of the song he says you want the real story, you shouldn't ask me / Better find someone else with the house key.
- “ Different idea? Maybe you agree with Lucky Toes: *The more I listen to "Loose Tongue", the more certain i am that it has to do with the unfortunate death of Michael Hutchence. Although most of Try Whistling This was recorded before his death the two codas to the song could have been tacked on to change it's meaning, especially the closing lines "he was only half way through his life, he never used up all his time". The lines "if you want a good story you shouldn't ask me" and "...because of my loose tongue" imply that we are all complicit in the medias often over-the-top treatment of people who are, after all, only human beings like the rest of us...*

Many's The Time

Clayton Bolger has sent me this insight into the origin of this song on Tim's "Before And After" -album: *They arrived at a nightclub in Dublin, where they were denied entry until someone recognised them (First we got turned away/then we got welcomed in). Once they were inside, the trio were given free drinks, but were questioning if they really wanted to be there (They gave us fruit cocktails/That we didn't want to drink/Techno Music coming through/I started to think). This song is ultimately about wanting to belong. The three men arrived at the nightclub in an old car and were turned away because of their appearance. Once it was realised who they were, Andy, Liam and Tim were happily admitted. They all co-wrote this fantastic song, but it was Tim who had the luxury of putting it on an album (Andy did perform backing vocals). This was because the ALT album was already finished and released at the time - however, the song became a staple on the ALT tour.*

Mean To Me

The following information comes from Jon-Paul Hansen from New Zealand, who posted it in "Tongue in the mail", the CH-Mailing-List. Actually, as of November 1996, there is some new evidence to this story; in the "Club-Members-Only-Live-CD" of the 1989 L.A. concert Neil asks whether anyone in the audience knew Te Awamutu. When the response was less than overwhelming, he - for no apparent reason - asked the same question about Palmerston North.
But here you go...

Transcript from a concert at the Palmerston North showgrounds, Feb 6, 1995:

- ◆ Neil: I'll now sing a song, the origin of which was Palmerston North. I wrote this one here, or the beginnings of it anyway. It was about when I was staying in a pub, I was doing a tour with Dave Dobbyn at the time, and this girl came all the way from America to meet me and wrote letters to my parents and kind of said if she saw me out, and I snubbed her, or I was mean to her in any way, she would never get over it. She would, y'know, go and throw herself off a cliff. Anyway...
- ◆ Nick: I know that feeling Neil, I get that in the hotel lobby every morning; "Where's Neil?"
- ◆ Neil: Yes yes yes, and umm, so anyway she turned up and we met, and we sat in the bar that night, I had a raging 'flu at the time and I went off to my room after saying hello and being as nice as I possibly could given my condition. And anyway I came back about half an hour later and here she was dancing with this poet, who I won't name (Gary McCormick, a popular NZ TV host), and they ended up going to bed together that night, terrible thing, and she ended up feeling really shattered and depressed in the morning and I thought 'well it was your own doing my love, it wasn't my fault'. Anyway that's the story, it's a pretty cold story really, I don't know why I bothered telling you all, but uh...
- ◆ Nick: Ooooh, ooh I want to know what you did in you bedroom between the time you went up there, and the next morning, or you came back downstairs.
- ◆ Neil: I went and blew my nose about fifty times...
- ◆ Nick: OK fine...
- ◆ Neil: And did fifty press-ups, you know...Anyway the song was pretty good anyway, the story was shit, but the song's good...She came all the way from America...

Mary Of The South Seas

was written for the record "Common Ground", which is a theme sampler about Irish origins. Neil and Tim had to do this song in just three hours. What they came up with was this slow bluesy number about their mother Mary, who had left Ireland for New Zealand at the age of three. A side note: "Tongue In The Mail" had a quote that said the only reservations the Finn Brothers had after recording this song, were that they would "have to play it on every family reunion for the rest of our lives"...

Mood Swinging Man

is about Neil and Tim's father Richard (according to both Finns in several concerts during their 1995 European and 1996 American tours).

Nails In My Feet

Here's some info about this one from Sarah Eil (NZ). She told me about a quote from Neil saying the line "nails in my feet" came from his walking around with nail shoes to aerate his lawn while gardening. There is of course a messianic reference in the title, since the Lord had nails in his feet when he was crucified. But I don't know if this isn't a red herring...

Niwhai

- ◆ According to Tim (Hamburg, Nov 9, 1995), this song was written about a friend of the brothers, who is "a real androgyne, a real he/she".
- ◆ Oddur Augustsson added this interpretation: *We think it refers to either psychoactive drugs (satellites are a motif often stamped on tabs of LSD) or mirror balls suspended in nightclubs - perhaps they visited 5 nightclubs/bars in the company of Niwhai on one wild night out.*
- ◆ Another quote pointed out that "satellite" was a slang expression for "lover" - find your own perspective here...

Only Talking Sense

The meaning of this song has been subject of quite a number of discussions. One of these (and the favourite of many) sees this as a song about child abuse within a family; and there is a point to this idea. Another is "misconception and misunderstanding in human relations"; about how the way we see people often differs widely from the way they see themselves. This is true in male/female relationships (we are true only when we talk the pillow), relationships in loco parentis such as teacher/pupil or preacher/believer and friendships that have an edge - the closeness of kindness and cruelty.

Parihaka

Inside information on the background of this Tim Finn song came from Anne-Marie de Bruin (New Zealand): *Well I can say that this song comes from the story of Parihaka in Taranaki (near the big mountain of the same name.) Anyway, the Te Whiti referred to in this song was the leader of this tribe. The British came to take away the land from the Maori here, and instead of fighting they peacefully protested that their land was going to be taken. Te Whiti was a peace loving person (hence the lines "the spirit of non-violence has come to fill the silence"). Anyway, when the British came, children and old people formed lines and sat singing (or something like that), however they were ignored and the village was burnt to the ground. And many horrible things happened to the villagers. They even showed us Tim's video for this song in a sociology class in University and the tutor said it was about one person realising about history, and trying to somehow put things right. (There you go! An academic take on Tim Finn in his own old University - Auckland!)*

The Parting Glass

is not a Finn song at all. Between 1991 and 1996 Neil frequently quoted this old Irish traditional in part or (occasionally) completely in concerts. "...and all the friends that I ever had / are sorry for my going away..."

Pineapple Head

According to Neil Finn in a MOJO interview in 1994, it started with my son Liam who had a fever. He was delirious and I was standing by with a cloth to cool him down and he just started talking about all these things. "Pineapple Head! Pineapple Head!" The he said "detective is flat" and "getaway car". So instead of staying there and doing what a father should do I ran downstairs and committed it to a song. Until my wife Sharon came in and looked at me in horror and said, "What are you doing here?" At the time you've got to go. There's enough time's when the idea pops into your head and you're not on the ball enough to write it down. Liam's 11 and I've exploited him mercilessly over the years. He wrote the line "here comes Mrs. Hairy Legs" in Chocolate Cake.

Private Universe

This one I learned about from listening to the Club-only Live-CD "Paul Is Dead": This song's inspiration came from the starlings that sat in the palm tree at Neil's Melbourne house every morning and evening, making so much noise Neil claimed he couldn't hear himself think. Once Neil has named this his favorite song, as opposed to "Into Temptation", which he called his most courageous song, given the subject.

She Goes On

In my opinion sort of a counterpiece to "Ne me quitte pas", the song Jacques Brel had written about his mother. The song seems to be about the memory of a beloved one - presumably of one or two generations the elder of the singer. A related one has passed away? Maybe a father explaining to his child that mother or grandmother has died? Here's what Linda Grudgings had found - a quote from Neil Finn: "Most of the songs I've written specifically about death have been because of a specific instance that's come along. There was a friend of mine whose mother died about 4 or 5 years ago and she asked me to write a song that they could play at the funeral. So I wrote the song called 'She Goes On' - not in any intention for Crowded House to do it, but it turned out really well and seemed to have a more general theme to it. So, but, you know, I don't wanna be afraid to tackle anything in particular, I think; death is an endlessly fascinating topic."

Strangely enough, the Belinda Carlisle version of the song ("He Goes On" - from her 1996 album A Woman And A Man) sounds very much like a woman singing about her lover. Rather straightforward and a little less subtle... or is it just me?

She Will Have Her Way

"Well it's one of those glorious ones that comes in about ten minutes or fifteen minutes. Most of the good ones do. I just wrote it in my basement and the initial inspiration for it was a dream that many people I know have had and I have had in fact; where you dream that you wake up unable to move in a dark and quiet space. And it's actually a quite a scary dream, and I suppose the song is me offering comfort" - taken from a radio interview on MIX 106.5 in Sydney, Australia, in December 1998 and sent to me by Kelly Campion.

Sister Madly

This info comes from Steve Pearson: *Neil used to share a room with his sister when they were young. She used to suffer badly from nightmares and would wake up screaming, scaring Neil.*

Something So Strong

The "true meaning" of this song came to me when I read the true story written by Colleen Mattan behind it: *This morning, while I was having breakfast, it struck me. Despite the resurgence of the 'just say "no"' campaign and the rather scurrilous speculations about the genesis of this song, the drug and the love interpretations for SSS are both wrong. Well, except that they're both right. You see, SSS is about one's love for the greatest drug of all....**caffeine**.*

The song is set up as a dichotomy. First we have what love can do:

Love can make you weep / Can make you run for cover / Roots that spread so deep / Bring life to frozen ground

That's all very well and true. But (and you can hear the 'but' in some live versions, so that's another clue as to what Neil really meant when he wrote this song), it's a good, hot, yes, strong, cup of coffee which really transforms all our lives:

Something so strong could carry us away / Something so strong / Could carry us today

This is confirmed by the 2nd verse, where we are told that love has its dark side:

Turning in my sleep / Love can leave you cold / Taste of jealousy / Is like a lust for gold

The chorus is repeated, reminding us that the thrill of love fades, but the thrill of a good French roast will never let us down. The bridge makes that much more sense when read in a caffeine-induced haze:

I've been feeling so much older / Frame me and hang me on the wall / I've seen you fall into the same trap / This thing is happening to us all

Here Neil shows us he feels our pain in the morning, before that first cup, and shows us that it's nothing to be ashamed of--it's 'happening to us all' and there is an easy way out--fire up the coffeepot. I know it's shocking and now many are wondering how I could accuse the boys of such wanton behavior. All I can say is that they speak quite openly of their coffee drinking in interviews and biographies, and I think we should seek to understand, rather than condemn, this addiction.

Souvenir

Jon-Paul Hansen quoted this on Tongue in the Mail: *Neil said "Souvenir" is about what goes on backstage with fans after a gig. It makes you never want to head back there after a show! The song makes perfect sense now!*

Suicide On Downing Street

Background info on this Tim Finn song comes from Carolyn Harvey: *Derek Bainbridge was a real person. It was in the 80's when Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister. From what I remember Tim tells the story as it happened. In drives for efficiency, a lot of people were made redundant. And due to the high unemployment, many in their late forties onwards hadn't much chance of finding another job because they were too close to retirement age for employers to take them on. They were left on the scrap heap. As a protest, feeling he had no future, Derek Bainbridge set fire to his car, while he was still in it, in Downing Street. The Tories just brushed it off as of no consequence.*

Tall Trees

Naval imagery all over this one. "Salt on your skin", "tall trees stand in the distance" (I can see the ships at the horizon)... My "vision" of this one places an old sailor at the port looking out waiting to see ships come and go, wanting to go out there again. Maybe he has brought some seeds from remote places to grow in his garden?

Together Alone

Together Alone is based on the Maori legend of why the earth and sky are separate, and maybe even the evolution of man. As the story goes, Father Earth and Mother Sky held a very close embrace of each other. So much so that their children, man, were getting crushed and could not move. I can't remember how, but the children forced the two apart and man stood up on their two legs for the first time. The Maori's believe that when it rains, it is the Mother crying and when there is mist it is the Father weeping, or something similar to that. If you read the Maori translation in Together Alone, the whole song makes sense if you know the story. It's like Mean To Me in the sense that you appreciate the song more if you know the story behind it, wrote Ignatius Tse from Sydney.

Try Whistling This

From Drew Sutherland: *Just a small point about the song Try Whistling This - in the first episode of Paul Hesters TV show (Hessie's Shed, in Australia on ABC) he had Neil as a guest. An audience member asked the question "What was your worst moment of violence in Crowded House?" and Neil answered with a tale about a gig in France where he and Paul had a bit of an argument on stage - and then after the show as they were leaving Paul pushed Neil through a door and he landed at the feet of a group of fans out the back waiting to meet him. According to Neil, as Paul shoved him he yelled 'come here!!'. At this point in the story Neil gave the audience a funny look and a shrug of the shoulders and said 'it's impossible to do'. Now consider the line in Try Whistling This: 'he said come here as he pushed me down / impossible to do'*

Turn And Run

- From Andrew Tupper:

My first reaction: It's a love song. Two people against the world; only the outside world can threaten their love. Despite the frailty of the lovers and the strength of the outside world, the world has no chance of breaking them. The world of the lovers resonates grace and happiness, and 'conventional' weapons can't stand against them. I love the strength of the imagery 'you cold killers of innocence, against us there's no defence'. 'Your flash' is an interesting reference to the intrusiveness of the media, who represent all that is evil.

My 2nd reaction: It's not about lovers, it's a peace/justice song, and the conflict image should be taken literally. Love and non-violence will triumph over weapons of war. 'You can pull us down, but you can't break our love' is straight out of any episode of non-violent protest last century. The light overhead is an atypically direct Neil image of God sustaining those involved in the struggle.

My 3rd reaction: It *is* about lovers, but not really about the outside world. The peace/justice imagery is a representation of the struggle in the relationship between the two. 'Everything's so out of control tonight, in a plane that's flying fast....' is a great representation of the feeling after a (still unresolved) bitter row. The threats to the relationship are internal, but are externalised here as a way of dealing with them. 'Have you left me now to trouble that won't let me lie' is the key line here. The 'you' in both verses is clearly referring to the partner, or at least the parts of the partner that are in conflict with the lover. Hence 'you' in the chorus is also the externalised conflict between the two, and the plural of 'killers' is a reflection of the multitude of issues that appear to be threatening the relationship. Against this, the declaration of the strength of love is still there, and the 'light overhead', while again a nod in God's direction, is more about the belief in the underlying strength of the love between the two.

The struggle for the writer is to reconcile a naive understanding of the relationship with the actuality of the strife. Despite the declaration of faith, there is a possibility left open that things will fall apart. The 'silver' (wedding presents?) is becoming covered in dust, and the 'desert heart' is a real risk.

- The events of Sep 11 give a whole new spin on a possible interpretation of this song; although prescience of this would mean our Neil Finn had known of this all along.

Weather With You

This song is full of quirky imagery hard to tie to specific subjects or places other than 57 Mt. Pleasant Street, which - according to Anne-Marie de Bruin (New Zealand) - is "almost" the former address of Neil and Tims sister. She had lived at #4, but #57 "sounded better". There you go, artistic freedom ;-)

"Stormy Weather" of course is the famous jazz standard from the Blackbird Revues on Broadway in the 40s. I don't think there is a need to lecture about the refrain and its meaning, except that Neil and Tim used to announce this song on the '91 European Woodface Tour with lines along "Everyone is a foreigner, almost everywhere". This song always lent itself well for mixing with other weather related standards like "Stormy Weather" or "Ain't No Sunshine"

When You Come

From Matt Lucas came this interpretation: *Like probably everyone else here, I noticed the sexual nature of the title, but the lyrics always seemed to be referring to something else. [Of course, you could make an argument that, with lines like "burning and exploding," it IS a sexual song.] BUT, when I saw the band on the WF tour in Austin, TX, and Neil introduced "When You Come" as being a song about the second coming of Christ. My wife and I looked at each other with complete bewilderment. "WHAT?" This really added a whole new level of meaning to the song for me, because I've always felt Neil's music has a very spiritual side. The lyrics, in typical Neil ambiguity, could well be about the second coming. I'm sure there are many other interpretations. I've also heard Neil introduce "When You Come" as an „ode to summer" and as „about Paul's summer holiday", so maybe he's making this stuff up as he goes along.*

There you go, just another example of excellent writing, Mr. Neil Finn (see In The Lowlands...)! As many fans know, the Finns frequently use song introductions in gigs to send the audience up a bit. But that's the fun of "reading" in their songs - there's so much to find...

Whispers And Moans

- ◆ This info comes from Katie Harrar: The Alan mentioned in the song is the notorious Australian real estate speculator Alan Bond, who became rich in real estate in Perth, Australia, won the America's Cup yachting race from the Americans for the first time in the history of the race, became a hero, overspent in the 1980's, went to jail, and now lives fairly quietly in disgrace. So, "sound investments" is really a joke on Neil's part.
- ◆ A recording of a New York concert has a quote from Neil about the song dealing with the barely audible noises you hear from people in the city at night (wink) - on Nov 24th, 1996 (Sydney) Neil confirmed that notion by dedicating that song to the people who have been to hotel rooms where they couldn't sleep due to noise from next door.

Wine Into Water

Kathy sent the following paragraph to the Tongue In The Mail: *I have a memory as well and might have influenced a line or two from "Wine into Water" off Tim's Big Canoe album. Before he went solo I attended a show that featured Split Enz and opening was Duran Duran [yes, in the early 80's] - one friend could not come so I had an extra ticket. To make a long story short, after the show their touring bus was parked out front and I could see them from the sidewalk. I motioned for them to come out, the mob had left, and no sight of Duran Duran or any one else around....for a while. The bus door opened and out they came, and a crowd appeared (naturally) but, I waited (and squeaked with emotion....staring boldly at Tim....he's got the voice) and got my unused ticket (that was for my brother, who couldn't come) signed by them all. I like to think that when I got my chance to speak with Tim and after someone mentioning, my "squeaks" out loud that when he said Hi to me, well, I was star-struck. But, back the story, a year or so later, the solo effort is out and I'm listening and oh-my-God, I heard my name ... "Kathy!" at the beginning of this song. My heart pounded, and how many Kathy's hearts did along with mine? Well, listening closer, I hear.... "I'm standing on the platform, got her ticket in my fist, and I'm staring at the flowers (my blue flowered dress that I wore and made myself) on her pretty printed dress.... so on and so forth... Kathy don't go, I did watch them get into a cab and leave, most likely to Georgetown for a bar!? I truly believe that this paragraph, if not the song was inspired by me. One mystery solved?*

World Where You Live

From the vaults of the Tongue In The Mail - mailing list I stole this Holly Murdock gem: *For the longest time, I too, saw the song as Neil's ode to introverts. A song for those of us who seem to understand and live life on a different level, and the people who love us. This is still what the song means to me, but I have another totally whacked out theory. The Tim/Phil interpretation: Tim considered Phil to be perfect, but didn't understand the things he did or the way his mind worked and was left wondering just where his world was. "Friends come round you might remember, and be sad/Behind their eyes is unfamiliar" could be about the period Phil rejoined the Enz, only to find Tim preoccupied with Liz. Hey, if Tim can write about Phil, why can't Neil? ;)*