

Lyrics for Anne Hills' Tracks

01. San Luis Valley Song (Anne Hills)

This was the first song that I wrote for "Tracks" ... the valley sang it to me and I wrote it down. - AH

Thunder on the mountain, travel on the tracks
wind kicks up the sand dunes at my back
Blue sky like a blanket, shaking out the dust
I'm looking for some green against the rust, Ayee-oo

I can hear the winter, moanin' mean and low
not much left to do here 'fore I go
but every amber sunset, every desert flower
keeps me holdin' faster to each hour, Ayee-oo

So I'll sing "The Pinto Pony", tell a story by the fire
of the gypsy and the cowboy and desire

Stars look down in wonder, at the beauty of it all
wanting just to be here they will fall
And if I would catch one for you and hold it in my hand
it couldn't be as perfect as this land, Ayee-oo

02. Ballad of Dan Moody (Michael Smith)

He used to be a roving cowboy
He used to be a rodeo cowhand
He tried to rob the Kansas railway
Along with two other friends of mine
I said For God's sake do not do this
They put it off for quite some time
Until the twelfth of January
Such a cold and a bitter time
Snow was drifting on the line

A mind confused is sometimes altered
So said a doctor friend of my acquaintance
Don't tell a madman with a shotgun
That he is not allowed to shoot no one
I foolishly kept my own counsel
Too easily tired of the fight
They done the deed and was successful
And come back the self-same night
Lookin' the same around the eyes

Me havin' recently found Jesus
I tried to speak to them as friends should do
Of the eternal consequences
And the awfulness of lives of sin
They soon fell in with sweet companions
Who helped them spend their evil wage
Until the thought of precious Jesus
Drove me to a holy rage
And I knew they must be saved

Then who comes riding through the blizzard
Then who comes riding through the wild deep snow
Some sheriff's deputies seekin' shelter
And information 'bout them three rodeo chums
I did not know that they'd be sleeping
That they'd come out with guns afire
And that all three was to be murdered
This was never my desire
This I swear I did not know
When I told the posse where to go

03. Transcontinental (Anne Hills)

I wrote this thinking of Ed Ellis who has loved the railroads enough to try and keep passenger service alive and even risk putting folk music on trains as a selling point ... now, that's a dreamer! There is such drama in railroad history. I'll also admit to loving the series Hell on Wheels which also came to mind. - AH

I am the cross ties, I am the rails, I am the engine, damp with steam
I'm the whistle through the lonely night, I am a gambler's dream

I'm bittersweet in history, born of sweat and sacrifice
not my fault, men were cold as they can be
as they made me run from sea to shining sea

I am the cross ties, I am the rails, I am the engine, damp with steam
I'm the whistle through the lonely night, I am a gambler's dream

Stories sing me through the centuries, built by dreamers, rogues and fools
always risk, always just a foot ahead
climbing mountains into valleys of regret

You use me as a metaphor in song
I'm romantic but I'm known for moving on
bringing music, clowns and circuses to town
and my cars roll by like verses in a ballad ten miles long

I am the cross ties, I am the rails, I am the engine, damp with steam
I'm the whistle through the lonely night, I'm a gambler's dream

A shadow on the landscape, in every state across the land
narrow gauges on a bluff or on a dare
hug the mountaintop or hover in mid-air

I am the cross ties, I am the rails, I am the engine, damp with steam
I'm the whistle through the lonely night, a gambler's dream
I'm a whistle through the lonely night

04. I Rode 'Em All, Man (Anne Hills)

I rode the ...
milk run, bullet train, monorail, funicular
boat train, freight train, you know, I'm not particular
intercity, main line, cable train was just fine
diesel engine, light rail, turbine blazed a trail
switchback, subway, cargo and by the way
Amtrak, metro, anyway you wanna go

I took the ...
Pennsylvanian, Maple Leaf, Zephyr and the Super Chief
rode the Lake Shore Limited, Adirondack yes, I did
Crescent and the Starlight, Illini and the Cardinal bright
Down where Hiawatha grew, and the old Blue Water too
City of New Orleans track, Heartland Flyer took me back
different lines at different times, great to ride but hard to rhyme

Palmetto and the Hoosier State, Wolverine, now that's a date
Ethan Allen, Auto Train, Piedmont and the what's his name
Vermont and the Silver Star, Texas Eagle isn't far
Meteor and Rio Grande, Saluki just across the land
Missouri River Runner 's fast, Keystone, that is not the last
Of course, the Carolinian, don't ask me to begin again

05. The Littlest Hobo (Anne Hills)

Like a couple other songs for "Tracks", this lyric felt like it was whispered in my ear..I wasn't sure, at first, if it was about a child until the phrase "a pocket sized delivery" rattled out. Then, I knew it was about a little dog. I found there are numerous dogs in the history of the rails and I remember one little dog in the book "Water for Elephants" (who comes to a less happy end). About a week after I finished this song, a little Hobo happened upon our doorsteps (weighing in at about one pound) and needed some help. Life is one mystery after another. - AH

He was the littlest hobo on the train
tucked inside his daddy's jacket
a pocket-sized delivery for a man without a home
the littlest hobo had to roam

He grew up sharing pork and beans
fell asleep to whiskey-scented stories
cans instead of dishes, stars instead of lights
the littlest hobo did alright

And tho' his daddy always tried his best
never left him cold or hungry
finding work was easy but keepin' work was hard
when their home was just an empty railroad yard

And when the winds blew cold
daddy hopped a southbound freight
sleeping in the corner of the empty cars
clicking wheels and moving state to state
and when the heat got bad
daddy headed north again
chuggin' of the engine, hummin' of the rails
brought the cooler nights and even cooler rain

He'd jump into his daddy's arms
warn him if the railroad bull's were comin'
from Maine to California, St. Paul to Santa Fe
with friends at every stop along the way

At nighttime in the fire's light
listenin' to the crickets and the snorin'
curled up by the bundle, underneath the sky
that sang the littlest hobo's lullabye

Every rounder came to know his name
but mostly called him "little scrapper"
'tho his tail was always waggin' 'til the night he slipped away
and caught the westbound, just before the day

06. Rider on an Orphan Train (David Massengill)

Once I rode an orphan train,
And my brother did the same.
They split us up in Missouri.
James was five and I was three.

He got taken by some pair,
But for me they did not care.
We were brave and did not cry
When they made us say goodbye.

That was the last I saw of him
Before some family took me in,
But I swore I'd run away
And find my brother James some day.

I went back when I was grown
To see how old the Children's Home (sic),
And I asked for to see my file
Of when I was an orphan child.

It's sad, they say, there's been a flood.

File washed away in Missouri mud.
Sometimes life is a stone wall.
You either climb or else you fall.

In every town on every street,
All the faces that I meet,
And I wonder could one be
My brother James come back to me?

Though I don't know where he's gone,
I have searched my whole life long.
Now I roam from town to town
But there's no orphan lost-and-found.

Sometimes I dream a pleasant sight:
My brother James and I unite.
Remembering our last goodbye,
No longer brave, we start to cry.

I hope he lives a life of ease,
All his days a soft warm breeze.
May he sit upon a throne,
And may he never sleep alone.

(Repeat first verse)

07. The Train to Morrow (P.D.)

Anne's arrangement of the vaudeville era song "I Want to Go to Morrow" originally written by Dan W. Quinn in 1902.

I started on a journey, just about a week ago
To a little town called Morrow in the state of Ohio
I've never been much of a traveler, so I really didn't know
That Morrow was the hardest place I'd ever try to go!

So I went down to the station for my ticket and applied
For tips regarding Morrow not expecting to be guyed (*means fooled*)
Said I, "my friend, I'd like to go to Morrow and return
No later than tomorrow, for I haven't time to burn."

Said he to me, "now let me see if I have heard you right--
You'd like to go to Morrow and return tomorrow night"
"You should have gone to Morrow yesterday and back today
For the train that leaves to Morrow is a mile upon its way ...

"If you had gone to Morrow yesterday now don't you see
You could have gone to Morrow and returned today at three.
For the train today to Morrow, if the schedule is right
Today it goes to Morrow and arrives tomorrow night.

Said I, "my friend, it seems to me you're talking through your hat
There is a town called Morrow on the line, now tell me that!"
"There is," said he, "but take from me a quiet little tip
To go from here to Morrow is a fourteen hour trip.

"The train today to Morrow leaves today at 8:45
At half-past ten tomorrow is the time it should arrive
So if you go today to Morrow it's a cinch you land
Tomorrow in tomorrow not today, you understand?"

Said I, "I guess you know it all, but kindly let me say
How can I go to Morrow if I leave this town today?"
"Well, well," said he, "you said it all, I think by now you know
That the only train to Morrow left today a while ago."

I was so disappointed I was mad enough to swear,
The train had gone to Morrow and had left me standing there.
The man was right in tellin' me that I was a howlin' jay
I can not go to Morrow 'til tomorrow is today.

08. Maria Took the Train to Town (Anne Hills)

Maria took the train to town she's never coming back
the snow has started falling on the pennies, on the track
the sugar maples catch on fire as carloads barrel past
she's listening to the Mission bells and drinking something burgundy
from green depression glass
they'll be missing her at mass

Maria took the train to town it was a cold walk there
she mentioned she was going as she twisted up her hair
the sun sets like a tangerine against the mountain's blue
she's listening the wheels below and humming something brokenly
as she gazes at the view
the horizon gazes, too

and the train rolls on forever, making stops along the way
passing love and joy and heartache, moving steady on 'til day

Maria took the train to town writing letters of regret
and she's wrapped them up in shades of blue too lovely to forget
she's drifting through the market now, past the ribbons long and bright
she's listening to the chattering and choosing something glittering
to tie the letters tight
she'll deliver them tonight

and the train rolls on forever, making stops along the way
passing love and joy and heartache, moving steady on 'til day

Maria took the train to town she's given up her name
and on the street they stare at her, like hunters at their game
her suitcase holds a notebook full of poems that she wrote
a homeless writer selling words, asking "something, anything"
she buttons up her coat
wind, a knife against her throat

Maria took the train to town the winter will be bleak
she thought if she tried hard she'd find what others seek
by the gates of disappointment swinging open in the breeze
Maria's lips are bitten raw, she's fumbling with a rosary
she whispers on her knees
won't someone help her please

and the train rolls on forever, making stops along the way
passing love and joy and heartache, moving steady on 'til day

Maria took the train to town I saw her from my door
she tipped her chin as if to say I've been this way before
I was hoping there'd be more ...

09. Winter Vigil (Eight & Sand) (Anne Hills)

This song came about because of my friendship with Peggy Ellis, who is always is thinking of others, especially those of us who are out on the road (with rails or without). - AH

When the snow has cloaked the valley,
Wind is howling at the ground
Tumblin' dreams across the flat land,
There's a train that's westward bound

Westward bound with winter's hunger,
Constellations point the way
Smoke curls lazy out of chimneys,
All the firewood stacked and ready
On this old year's shortest day

Travel safely, watch the bridges
Railroad crossings, clear of trouble, straight and true
In my heart I'll keep the springtime
Evergreen, this love for you

Racing further into shadows,
As the quiet fills the night
Way beyond the farthest distance,
There's a train that shines its light

Shines its light through bitter darkness,
Cutting into sleet and drift
Someone's locking up the station,
Headed home, the blizzards comin'
At the ending of his shift

Travel safely, watch the bridges
Railroad crossings, clear of trouble, straight and true
In my heart I'll keep the springtime
Evergreen, this love for you

It's emptiness and longing,
It's the frost against the glass
That can push the traveler onward,
And buy that endless railway pass
Always moving cross the country,

Chasing after tender spring
Someone's stoking up the fire,
Puts some biscuits in the oven
I can almost hear her sing

Travel safely, watch the bridges
Railroad crossings clear of trouble, straight and true
In my heart I'll keep the springtime
Evergreen, this love for you

10. Pullman Porter Christmas (Anne Hills & Peter Erskine)

My long-time friend Peter Erskine often sends me melodies to set to lyrics. This was originally a labeled "Christmas Memories" and I had been thinking about Pullman Porters and their place in Civil Rights history ... I added the chorus after watching a video about Pullman Porters. - AH

Standing tall, uniform is pressed
Immaculate and proud, a Pullman Porter now,
Deep snow, is falling thick and fast
But still this Christmas train is bound, to leave Chicago town
I hear the whistle blow, pull up the stairs to go

Made it here on a different kind of train
A freed slave from the south, a Pullman Porter now
This job to work the sleeper cars
This chance to make another life, with children and a wife
To buy myself a home and call my life my own

Sweet freedom - dreaming of equality
Sweet freedom - shine it down on me

Work is hard, each month 400 hours
11,000 miles, a Pullman Porter now
Not much sleep, I pay for every meal
It's my job but I'm nobody's boy, don't call me George, it's Roy
And every tip I get, I've earned it twice, you bet

Sweet freedom - dreaming of equality
Sweet freedom - shine it down on me

And some day, I'll ride this train myself
Some one will wait on me, a Pullman Porter now
I'll sit and watch the towns roll by
Through this land I'll travel truly free, beside my family
Chase the setting sun, and hear the words "Well done."

Sweet freedom - dreaming of equality
Sweet freedom - shine it down on me

11. Like a Train (Anne Hills)

Could have been the whistle howling through the dark
Whisper of the wheels on the track, I could hear your gentle voice
Giving me no other choice, lifting me and carrying me back

Could have been the shadows, falling on the rails
Conductor's silhouette against the car, I could see your smiling face
In some other time and place, suddenly just like a shooting star

And I rode that memory just like a train, just like a train rolling into the past
I rode that memory just like a train, rode it all the way back to you

Could have been the platform wet with summer storm
Rainbow flashing as the sun broke through, I could sense your laughter there
In the brightening of the air, knew that there was nothing else to do

So, I rode that memory just like a train, just like a train rolling into the past
I rode that memory just like a train, rode it all the way back to you

Some memories are like that moving steady, moving fast
Like the 20th Century Limited, made to last

Could have been the station, could have been the song
Floating on the wind blowing by, standing in the ticket line
I could feel your hand in mine, back when it was only you and I

12. City of New Orleans (Steve Goodman)

Riding on the City of New Orleans, Illinois Central, Monday morning rail
Fifteen cars and fifteen restless riders, three conductors
And twenty-five sacks of mail

Out on the southbound odyssey, the train pulls out at Kankakee
Rolls along past houses, farms and fields, passin' towns that have no name
freight yards full of old black men and the graveyards of the rusted automobiles

Good morning, America, how are you?
Don't you know me? I'm your native son.
I'm the train they call The City of New Orleans
I'll be gone five hundred miles when the day is done

Dealin' cards with the old men in the club car
Penny a point, ain't no body keepin' score
Won't you pass the paper bag that holds the bottle
Feel the wheels grumblin' 'neath the floor

And the sons of pullman porters, and the sons of engineers
Ride their daddy's magic carpet made of steam
Mothers with their babes asleep are rockin' to the gentle beat
And the rhythm of the rails is all they dream

Good morning, America, how are you?
Don't you know me? I'm your native son.
I'm the train they call The City of New Orleans
I'll be gone five hundred miles when the day is done

Night time on The City of New Orleans
Changing cars in Memphis, Tennessee
Half way home, and we'll be there by morning
Through the Mississippi darkness rolling to the sea

And all the towns and people seem to fade into a bad dream
And the steel rails still ain't heard the news
The conductor sings his song again, "The passengers will please refrain"
This train's got the disappearing railroad blues

Good night, America, how are you?
Don't you know me? I'm your native son.
I'm the train they call The City of New Orleans
I'll be gone five hundred miles when the day is done
I'll be gone a long, long time when the day is done.

13. Fallen Flag (Anne Hills)

I thought I was done writing songs for Tracks until an abandoned passenger car in a field on the way to Howlin' Dog Studios told me otherwise ... kind of an environmental comment. - AH

A Rio Grande car, I've been abandoned in a field -
memories around me where I rest
I was meant to move but I'm as still a wheel -
broken, like a sinner whose confessed
Back, while in my glory, I was christened
and new, people came to see me, knew my name
mamas told their babies, yeah, the daddies told their sons,
"You know, this world 'll never be the same."

time brings change, yeah, ready or not
the grass grows over and the tracks all rot
field sparrow nests on a crossing sign
mice built a home in the rusty number nine
come and meet me at the station, where the crowds rolled by
and the smoke was like a welcome in the big tent sky

back when Henry Ford was just a twinkle in the eye -
of the Mr. and the Mrs. as they kissed
I was chasing buffalo, the future on my back -
moving through the gun smoke and the mist
passengers were plenty and the energy, coal -
everything so different than today
highway passin' by me is a trouble and a must -
"a necessary evil," so they say

time brings change, yeah, ready or not
the grass grows over and the tracks all rot
field sparrow nests on a crossing sign
mice built a home in the rusty number nine
come and meet me at the station, where the crowds rolled by
and the smoke was like a welcome in the big tent sky

Now, I can travel cleaner than an airplane or a truck -
Greener, yeah, and cheaper I should know
I been right here watching as the world spins wild -
Weather's putting on a funny show
We never know what happens when we pass on by -
When or if we ever do come back
All I know is when it comes to carrying my worth -
Can do ten times over that's a fact

Time brings change, yeah, believe it or not
Stratosphere 's thinner but the sun 's still hot
Sparrow's nest gone from the crossing sign
Temperature is stayin' at a steady 99
So, come and meet me at the station where the crowds rolled by
And the smoke was like a welcome in the big tent sky

'Cause time brings change, yeah, ready or not