

**Stephen Robertson**

## **Ninety-six and counting**

How little I really know of your life!  
From the moment almost a half-century ago  
when I first met your daughter  
I have known fragments, snatches—  
some now half-remembered, some long since forgotten—  
but nothing that resembles a narrative.

Born nineteen-seventeen (dark days of the first world war)  
in Sheffield, steel town.  
Mother once ran a fish-and-chip shop.  
A young rambler, you take part  
in the mass trespass on Kinderscout.

Meet a dashing young fellow rambler.  
Marry, find a home  
on the very edge of Sheffield  
facing the Derbyshire moors.  
But the next war comes, and D is now called up.  
First to Hunmanby on the north-east Yorkshire coast  
for the requisite square-bashing. And then when he ships out,  
back to mother, in a two-up-two-down  
full of family and lodgers. Daughter born  
at the height of the Luftwaffe's  
blitz on Sheffield.  
In north Africa, D is killed.

Later, one of the lodgers—  
Polish serviceman and refugee—  
is worth another try. A son.

Council house the other side of Sheffield.  
Polish husband transforms into  
Yorkshire male, expecting  
tea on the table when he returns from work  
in a Sheffield steel mill.  
Daughter moves away to teach, and then  
to marry me. Son develops  
schizophrenia.

After G's death, a chance  
for something new: migrate south  
to London, two grandchildren,  
and a world to explore.  
But within a few years, both son and daughter  
are dead too. Back to Sheffield again.

How many friends have you outlived? Eventually  
the Sheffield ties become more tenuous,  
legs weaken, and isolation palls.  
One more great change, one more new beginning:  
a different kind of home  
here on the north Norfolk coast.

The wonder is that you can still laugh.