

ON ROAD



A Celebration of GRT writing
From HMP/YOI Parc

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Foreword

On Road is the finest collection of Traveller lives told by Travellers that I have ever encountered.

Nowadays, there is an extraordinary amount of coverage of Gypsy, Romany and Irish Traveller communities on the internet, on television, in newspapers and in many academic journals. Needless to say, references to these ethnic groups are almost always negative. We often hear *about Travellers* but we so rarely hear *from Travellers*. This collection from HMP Parc goes a long distance in challenging this trend.

On Road is a stunning collection primarily because it does not edit out, or change the real voice of Gypsies and Travellers. In this book, you can find authentic lives of Travellers in Britain and Ireland from the 20th and 21st Centuries. It is a compilation which doesn't pull any punches; it shows how Travellers view the world, not how *gorjas* would like Travellers to view the world or how *gorjas* would like Travellers to act.

For those who wish to understand Gypsy Romany and Irish Traveller lives they would do well to start with this publication. The following writing offers a glimpse of the diverse experiences of the broad GRT communities - a young Traveller growing up in the modern world; the uniqueness of being a Traveller growing up during the Troubles in the North of Ireland; courting a woman; the pleasure and prejudice of life on the open road; the horse dealing and the fairs.

The most powerful part of this publication is its overwhelming honesty. A number of contributions tell of the hardship of trying to make a living or just trying to survive but none of the stories are self-pitying. For example, 'Back in the Day' comically tells how the writer got locked up for the first time as a boy, while 'The

Open Road is an outstanding social history of Gypsy life with all its challenges, not least the possibility of being removed into care simply for being a Gypsy child.

The author of 'Back in the Day' writes:

'When I was a kid I lived in Traveller sites and moved from camp to camp and it was good. How can I describe it for you non- Travellers to understand? Imagine changing your back garden every few weeks.'

This collection more than anything helps the non –Traveller to understand a little bit more. The collection does of course, show the hardship and the prejudice but it also shows the family bonds, the traditions, the humour and the strength of the Traveller communities from which the writers come. On what could almost be a reflection on the resilience of the Travelling way of life in modern Britain, the writer of 'Sitting on a Horse' on leaving Appleby Fair comments:

'The amazing fun we had had was enough of a reminder of what life is like living back on the drom (road) to satisfy any imaginable wander lust for that moment and for the imaginable future ... Still regardless of our fatigued intentions we both could not help saying to all our friends we had made and old cousins of the Travelling nation: "See you at the next fair kushti bok (good luck) and farewell".

Years ago, the *Traveller Equality Project* published a report 'Voices Unheard: A Study of Travellers in Prison' which became the basis for some of the improvements in access to services for GRT prisoners. The main point of the report was that Travellers in prison (who represent 5% of the entire prison population) have been largely invisible and voiceless. *Open Road* is another significant step forward in creating a culture in which Travellers are empowered to own and tell their own stories both inside prison and in wider society. The eloquent voices of the Traveller prisoners in HMP Parc can now, at last, be heard.

One can only hope that other initiatives will develop, inspired by this project, in which Traveller voices speak about Traveller lives and through which non-Travellers can understand a little more about these deep, diverse and culturally-rich communities.

Dr Conn Mac Gabhann
Manager
Traveller Equality Project



Ethnicity

I once asked an Irish Traveller to tell me about his culture. His response was unexpected and wise in a way that I was beginning to recognise as 'Traveller' .

'OK but can you tell me about yours first?.'

Immediately I realised what a difficult and seemingly impossible thing I had just asked. With a smile he continued

'It's how you are. It's how you think, it's how you decide things, it's the very core of you. It's everything that's important to you. It's what makes you tick. That's what makes you a traveller. I was born a traveller that's why I am one and somebody else isn't. You can't just adopt a lifestyle and become a Traveller you have to be one. It's in your blood.' It's your upbringing, your history, your values, your traditions.'

One such important tradition in Traveller society is storytelling. I was told that gypsy storytellers could start a story one day and it wouldn't finish till the next and like the sagas of old, the core of the culture is embodied within the tales of heroes, histories and lineage.

This small collection of work of everyday events and memories is the result of working and talking to Travellers in HMP Parc. These tales of Traveller life allow insight into a culture that is often closed to outsiders. I'd like to thank all the men who have taken part and invited us to the 'caban'.

Phil Forder – Equality and Diversity manager HMP Parc

Early Memories as a Young Traveller

My Parents

My mother was one of 17 children and my father one of fifteen. I have 250 first cousins! My father always worked and as children we were not allowed to sit still, If he came home from work to find us sitting on the sofa he would make us get up and go out. It didn't bother him if we weren't doing household chores as long as we out kicking a football or climbing a tree my dad was happy, he hated laziness. He worked as an odd job man fixing fences, washing windows, painting houses, landscape gardening. Anything someone wanted doing my Dad would do it. He did anything to keep working and earning money and he taught me the value of money this way. I never forget the first time he paid me for helping him on a job. He gave me £10. He told me to spend a £1 on sweets if I wanted to, but to put £9 in my money box. Because of this I learnt to respect money.

School

I remember when we were living in Belfast. The year was 1987 and I was about 7 or 8 years old. It was the first time I went to school. I remember thinking it was really cool because the teacher decided on one class for the travellers and I would get to be with my brothers, sisters and cousins. It wasn't just my immediate family but lots of travellers that she put together. Now I'm an adult I look back at that time and realise there was nothing cool about it. It was actually my first introduction to discrimination.

The Visit

What was actually cool was around this time some Native Americans were travelling through Ireland and they came to visit our camp. They told us how we shared traditions such as building and lighting fires and everyone gathers around the campfire to chat and share stories. Like the Romany travellers the elders drank and also chatted with each other around the fire. I loved that day with the Native Americans, we had so much fun. It was great being around people who understood our ways of life. I don't recall their names but I do remember dressing up in their traditional dress. To this day my mother still has the pictures of me, my sister and brother dressed up in the headdresses and I look back on that photograph with fond memories.



Derry

When we travelled to Derry we set up camp on a neglected patch of land which we named Daisy Field Park. A few years later my father and uncle petitioned hard for that patch of land so that the travellers there could call it their permanent home. They eventually won!

I would often walk with my dad to the local shop when he wanted cigarettes and we had to go via the rugby field to get there. On the other side of the rugby field was the River Foyle. One day we saw about ten men and I remember clinging onto my Dad and feeling very scared of what they were wearing. They were dressed in Black balaclavas, black jumpers with a brown belt across the chest and big black boots. A group of people had gathered around to look at them but kept their distance. We watched the men jack up a 20 foot caravan and push it straight into the river. No one there that day tried to stop them through fear. This was my first real experience of the Northern Ireland troubles and looking back I think the men were part of the Ulster freedom fighters. They hated the Catholics and therefore hated the travellers as most travellers are Catholic. The British Army barracks were only about a quarter of a mile away from our camp and it became a very familiar sight to see patrol cars and dark grey armoured vehicles going up and down the road directly outside of our camp. People would throw bricks at them. They would come into our camp at night with flashlights and disturb people sleeping. The dogs would start barking and children would wake up crying. If we went anywhere they would stop and search us. If we were driving they would search the car. I remember vividly in 89 a bomb going off and the windows in a number of caravans on our camp shattering. My cousin and I offered to clear up my auntie's area but she firmly told us to leave it until the police came. I figured she wanted the Police to know just how bad life was becoming for us travellers.

We eventually moved on from Derry to Strabane where the army camp was even closer but I remember the soldiers being much friendlier to us. It was a good time but we had to leave Strabane after a few months because my Uncle's family had been arguing with another Irish family on our site and my Uncle got stabbed. My Dad hated any kind of trouble and always moved us on when it began. In a traveller family it does not matter who is doing the arguing, all the family are held responsible and targeted. My Dad decided to move us to Bedfordshire in England to get us as far away from trouble as possible. We carried on travelling and spent time in Leicestershire, and Oxfordshire. Then we went back to Ireland, but to the south in Dublin. From there it was back to Oxfordshire and onto Cardiff. I know it was 1997 when we came to Cardiff because it was the day Princess Diana died and it was all over the television and radio.



Courting

We Travellers have very strict rules about dating and courting. Young men and girls are not allowed to be alone with each other before marriage. At wakes and marriages the unmarried boys and girls are not allowed to be together and stay at opposite ends of the hall. This is how it is. It is considered disrespectful to even talk about any sexual nature— this is not allowed by any traveller girl as they do not believe in sex before marriage.

Being a Traveller girl is hard when they are in love as they are not allowed to be left alone except on night outs to the cinema. This is to make sure that there is no sexual intercourse made between the couple. An unmarried girl is not allowed into her boyfriend's caravan under any circumstances. It is disrespectful to the man should this to happen.

When I was fifteen I met a young girl who I liked from the first time we made eye contact we fell in love. This girl was wondering why she could not meet my mum and dad as I used to go to her mum and dad's and spend time and have a cup of tea. The reason was that my mum would have to approve she was the right girl for me.

My mum later on, after a few months had passed rang my partner and asked if she could visit. I was also there when we heard the doorbell go. My mother walked in and introduced herself and I then left the house leaving them alone with my sister as well. I do not know what was said and still do not to this day. When I returned a while later I found my mother and sister and girlfriend still talking. My mother then winked at me – This was to let me know she was happy with the choice of girl. It was down to my mother then to inform my father about the match.

Even though my parents did approve I still had to be back in my trailer on the site every night.

We often went to the cinema together. I used to pay as it is a Traveller's duty to do so and it is respectful to the family. When I turned seventeen we went to watch this film but I needed to go to the toilet first, when I returned my girlfriend had already bought the tickets for the film which I found very offensive due to the nature of my culture. We were arguing in the hall of the cinema and I refused to watch the film. Total cost of the tickets, £20. I demanded that she took the money off me but she refused, she said I paid for everything. We missed the first three minutes of the film until she eventually took the money back off me. I explained I was a travelling man and I should financially support the ladies and to remember what our culture is.



Paddy

My name is Paddy. I'm 24 years old and I was born in Sligo in Southern Ireland. A lot of people know me as King Paddy. My father is a King Traveller on the site I am from. I can speak Gaelic and 'Traveller Talk'. I have never been to school. I have learnt what I know from working with family and going to jail.

I do a lot of bare knuckle boxing for a living. I've been married for 5 years to my wife who I have got two kids with. My daughter's name is Tiana which means 'Princess' in Gaelic. She is four years old. She is not in school as the family moved around a lot and it is also in our culture not to attend school. It's the way we are as Travellers. You will find though most Traveller girls will go to school more than the men.

I like to go hunting. I go deer hunting and rabbit hunting too. I work on the out as a builder. I've done patios, decorating and tarmacing. I've done this from a young age.

I started boxing with gloves when I was five years old. I carried on boxing until I was fifteen. I've had amateur fights in Wales, 20 matches altogether at middleweight. I've had five wins by points, ten knock-outs and five defeats against me.

I then went into fighting for money. In our culture we class this as bare-knuckle boxing. I have been in most places in England and Wales due to me travelling. In most of the places I have had a fight with other Travellers in order to keep my family name good and to have respect off other Travellers.

I did not just fight Travellers but other people too as a lot of people judge the Traveller's life as being rough but with honour. As we have always been taught by the King Traveller of the families, always to shake hands after a fight and never hold grudges.

The Open Road

It was a lovely cold frosty morning. The promise of a nice day. I got some wood out of the hedgerow to make a fire. I filled the kettle and put it on the kettle iron which hung over the fire and then filled a bucket with water for the horses. As the mare was drinking I could hear a few goldfinches singing away in a nearby bush. One of them was picking the seeds from a thistle for her young chick. I looked over towards the wagon to see the steam coming from the spout of the kettle. As I got near the fire, my young son was coming out of the wagon rubbing his eyes from being just woken up. He asked me was breakfast ready which was not so he then walked over to the mare and foal which was a regular routine for him in the mornings. He spent about fifteen – twenty minutes with them and came to the fire for his breakfast which was nearly cooked. Home cured bacon and eggs which he ate quite quickly as he was going to town with his mother.

I harnessed the horse and put her in the shafts of the cart until they were ready. As they were riding off a car pulled up on the verge. A tall thin man got out and walked over to the fire. He said good morning and as he said it his eyes were back and forth. Looking for his dog no doubt, I thought as he came the day before when I was not there. Then he asked if I had seen it. I replied no.

We got talking. I put the kettle back on the fire and made us both a cup of tea. Then he says that he had just bought a piece of land and it needed a lot of work doing on it. Cutting back the hedgerows and grass.

I said that I would do the work, so we agreed on a price. I told him that I needed to pull on his land to be near the job. He agreed right away.

He next morning was promising to be another hot day. So we were on the road to Ledbury. The road wasn't easy as it was mostly hills that zig-zag shapes and snake like bends which made it a little hard for the mare but I knew she would do it. The sweat from under the collar and saddle was foaming white from the strain of the wagon and the sun beating down on her back.

She was slipping and sliding from the new shoes I put on her the day before.

We were at the top of the hill at last and we rested for at least twenty minutes. Then I gave her a well-deserved drink. The entrance to our destination wasn't easy as I had to cut my way through the trees to make a way through. As I cut the last overgrown hedge I could not believe my eyes. It was a sight for sore eyes. It was a lovely green field with a stream running alongside the hedge which split the two fields apart from one another and before I could unharness the horse, my son got out his fishing rod and ran to the stream. I pulled the mare from the shafts, unharnessing her and tied her to the cart which the wife was driving behind me. I made a fire quickly as we were all hungry by now. We ate our dinner quite fast then I walked the horses over to the stream.

They drank the cool crisp running water right away. They stayed there for a while cooling down from the hot hard day. Then I tethered them down for the night. The fire was going out as everyone was in the wagon going to bed. I put a few more logs on the fire and made myself a cup of tea and sat down to reflect on the day that we have had. The next morning wasn't very nice, wind and rain was in for the day. I made a fire in the wagon and put the kettle on. I then moved the horses into some shelter of some trees. I came back to the wagon to find tea and breakfast on the table for me which Helen had prepared. The she said, that's me done for the day and went back to bed as there wasn't any work to be done today in the wet weather. Wyndham was putting a coat on this foal. He was soaking wet as he never had a coat on himself. I shouted over to him to get in the wagon (and change his) clothes and get warm. Which he replied, yes dad, I will, don't keep on at me. But as usual I had to carry him back kicking and screaming. We spent most of the day in the wagon. Finally the rain eased off. I unwrapped a large canvas sheet. Tied it to a tree and the wagon so we had a little shelter fro the rain. I was making a fire outside for Helen was going to make a pot of broth and as I was doing this I said I would make a few pegs. She replied, oh that's nice but what for?

For you to go out and sell them?

Oh no, she says, not me. It is quite obvious you have got me mixed up with someone else.

Not long after we got married I made a bunch of roses and gave them to her and before I could say to her, go out and sell them – she says to me – they are beautiful, thank you – which put me in an awkward position.

The she laughed out loud and said – I knew what they were for but go and sell them yourself. Selling things door to door wasn't for her but she was very good at making Christmas wreaths, baskets, cooking and shoeing the horses as she was brought up with wagons and horses. Her father still today travels around the countryside with his three beautifully decorated ornate Bill Wright wagons. A very skilful man with horses and wagons.

Wyndham and myself went for a walk with two terriers and a ferret – we got about half a mile across muddy and wet fields, then he grabbed my arm and whispered, be quiet dad. I can see a pheasant. He pulled out his pocket catapult and fired a steel ball. He missed. I says to him – What are you doing with that? – because the week before he was using the catapult and hit his own thumb which took his nail off. I put it in my pocket but somehow he had sneaked it out of my pocket and walked off.

I was getting the nets up and put the ferret down the hole – Two rabbits bolted at once from the same hole. I quickly took hold of the net and as I was doing this, the terrier caught hold of the other one - So we got ourselves a dinner, I says to him.

Yes, he replied and I have just found a live pheasant.

I quickly checked my pocket for the catapult. He wasn't just a good hunter, he was a very good liar as well.

We ate rabbit and pheasant broth that night

Helen got into bed – Wyndham got on my lap and cwtched into me by the fire and fell asleep without a care in the world. I took him into the wagon and put him next to his mam – I gave him a kiss and said, dream lovely dreams my son.

We finish the work on the land within three weeks.

Helen suggested we should pull into Shrewsbury as her father was stopping there. So we made our way to Shropshire. Like always we weren't in any rush. It took us three days to get too Leaminstor which is a lovely town with it's Edwardian buildings that lean over onto the street. As we were just getting out of town, I noticed the collar was rubbing the mare just a little but would get worse. I put a little ointment on it until we could find a place to stop for the night.

We pulled down a narrow lane and onto a wide verge – I tethered the horses down for the day – We stayed four days, enough time for the mare to heal.

Helen went shopping – So I positioned the wagon and cart and sorted out a fire for a well earned mug of sweet tea. I was cleaning the harness when a silver Mercedes pulled up onto the grass. A very large man got out and walked over to the fire and one of the terriers got hold of his trouser leg. I shouted to leave him alone and she ran under the cart and lay down – I'm from the council, he says, but not on duty. I've just stopped to admire the caravan. I was born in one, he says, just like this one as my father was a gypsy man but not my mother. I was seven years old when we moved into a house and I've been there ever since. My father died four years ago – My mother is still going strong at a ripe age of 88 – We got talking about how things have changed, especially for gypsies.

Then I was taken aback when he said he still had his father's wagon which needed a hell of a lot of work to be done too but he never had the time and money to spend on it. I said that I would if I was still here and no one has come to move me yet.

Helen came back in a taxi. She made dinner, one of my favourites. A breast of lamb fried on an outside fire.

Around about noon the following day which was a Sunday, Wyndham and myself made our way to see the somewhat friendly councilman = It was about five miles away in a lovely area of the country. As we drove up to his house, two huge great danes came running up to us barking. I felt a little nervous but Wyndham just got off the cart and started patting them which they seemed to like.

A young girl came from the back of the house and said hello, how can I help?

I'm here to see your father, I replied.

My granddad, she said.

Within a few minutes he appeared. – Come in, come in, he said. His wife, a tall thin good looking woman in her late 50's – we got chatting away about his family and bygone days and how his wife and only granddaughter would love to travel but never did and probably never would. I thought his house was very posh with traces of his gypsy heritage around the living room. He got out a rather old and rugged looking photo album of his younger travelling days.

An hour went by when Wyndham mentioned the wagon we had come to see.

The lock on the shed door had been broken off due to years of neglect and rain. We finally got in – We pulled the plastic sheet off which was covering the wagon. The dust went everywhere and the sun shining through the skylight and doors of the shed made it worse

– We waited for it to settle – It was a Dunten wagon and a very good one in it's day – Dunten only made three types – It was a square type with two windows on each side with a mollycroft roof – A type of skylight. Four wooden wheels which was tucked underneath the bed of the wagon. It was in really poor condition. I opened the door which fell off but I was somewhat surprised when I went in inside as the woodwork was in pretty good condition – The carvings of grapes, horses heads, birds and all sorts of fruit carved out in that rococo style era – It had its original Queen Anne stove and above it the mantle had a cut glass mirror of fruit – I slid two doors open to reveal the bed.

Outside the wagon the Lansford shafts were rotten. The kettle box was hanging from the floor of the wagon. It needed a lot of work but if done it would be an eyeful as there's not many original wagons left as they were burned after the owner had died and all of their belongings.

As we were about to leave the shed, Wyndham noticed a set of wooden wheels which was covered with a sheet. It was a goat cart which Wyndham was looking for for awhile. He had asked me to make him a miniature wagon. He asked the man how much he wanted for it – as he said it the granddaughter says to her granddad – give it to him.

Don't charge him, he really likes it. With that he said ok, it's yours – Wyndham's eyes lit up. I then asked what his intentions were with the wagon – Let's go back into the house and have a cup of tea.

I would like you to rebuild it back to it's original condition. I told him it would be cheaper to get one made from new. Rebuilt, I told him it was going to cost a lot of money and time.

Just how much, he says.

I just couldn't give him a price at that moment in time.

The next morning we were laying in bed – Helen asked me if I was going to sort out that wagon – So I told her that if I did start on it we wouldn't be seeing her dad for quite awhile but she wanted me to take on this huge task because she loved helping me making wagons and she was quite good herself with wood and most of all she was after a set of crown derby dishes she had seen on display in some shop window.

We finished the wagon sooner than we thought – The proud owner was more than pleased with the work and price and gave us a bonus and just as we were leaving I asked him would he sell it – He just gave me a smile and said, take care and don't be a stranger. Well, we were on our way to Shrewsbury again.

A few days we were not far from Craven Arms when a free lance tracker just pulled out of a field and drove it's spike through the horses neck with Helen and Wyndham driving – The horse didn't die right away. It was raring, kicking, which was very sad to see. Helen took Wyndham across the fields so he could not see what was going on but he knew what was happening as he was forward for his age as all gypsy children are. So a gypsy life isn't all milk and honey. As it has it's hard times as well.

We finally got to our destination. Helen's mother could see us coming down the lane and ran towards us hugging and kissing her and Wyndham and when I looked around I was on my own. They were running towards her dad. I was left with the wagon – cart and horses – I pulled the wagon about thirty feet from the in-laws, unharnessed the mare and foal from the cart and did the same to them – When that was done all I had to do was relax for the remainder of the day.

We sat talking by the fire until way after midnight. The fire was going down – Just a few embers remained as I said good night and climbed up into the wagon for a good night's sleep.

I woke up to the smell of bacon cooking outside. I was the only one in bed. Everyone was by the fire having breakfast and chatting away – My father-in-law could hear me getting out of bed and shouted, get up lazy. The day is almost over.

I looked at my watch, it was 7.30 am – a little late for me, I thought. I stepped down from the wagon and was handed a mug of tea.

I got the best red and white mare you'll see in this part of the country. You could tie the four wheels of the wagon and she could still pull it and I'm not asking the world for her – She's bomb proof – Take her for any trial, the father-in-law says.

She was about fourteen. One long tall feather and mane. Yes, she was a good looking horse. A thick heavy cob – There was part Irish and gypsy cob in her. The old fashioned type horse that you don't see nowadays.

So we haggled – bid – haggled So she was mine. As I needed a spare horse because I did not want to use the one mare as she was not all that fit from having the foal.

I'm halfway finishing a wagon, he says. He was building a barrel top – As I had nothing to do I thought I'd help him. Not that he needed it as he was a professional wagon and drey builder and a very skilled wheel wright but this was his first wagon for about three years – As he was breeding miniature dogs that would replace the ferret, he gave me two of them and to my surprise they were better than the ferret – They looked timid and feeble but they were as tough as old boots with the heart of a lion and would sleep outside in all weathers.

I was fixing the lock (the under carriage) of the wagon when my father-in-law mentioned about having a move. I said that I don't mind but where?

He then said, Telford- Loken Gates – He seen the expression on my face and then said, don't worry it's not like forty years ago as times have changed – because forty years ago Gypsies and Travellers would not travel through Telford – Shrewsbury or Hereford – As the police and Social Services would take the children away from the parents and put them in care – So back in those days the

mother and children would take the bus ahead of the wagons . My father once told me a story about when he and his three younger siblings travelled through Telford. The police had stopped his mother and father and asked where they were going and asked them if they had any children and how many and they phoned social services and said they weren't cared for and under-fed.. Gypsy children are always fed as when they are hungry they will eat and when thirsty they will drink. There wasn't a set time to eat and drink, you just ate when you wanted to – So they just took the kids and left the parents in tears – My father was the second oldest, so it was down to him to get his younger siblings out – Sneak them out and that was what he did. On the third night he took them out of there and travelled two nights to where the wagons were at that time. They walked at night and rested in the day – He stole a few chickens and potatoes to feed his younger sister and two brothers – My dad was only twelve when this happened. So he grew up well before his time. From then on he only went once back to Telford and that was when my younger sister was born in a barrel top wagon.

All gypsy children were born at home with the help of other gypsy women in those days. But things are different now. Most gypsy kids have never seen a wagon.

I myself am one of seventeen and the only one that still lives and travels around in a wagon and three of five of my children were born in a wagon.

Loken Gates is a lovely area and my father-in-law chose a good spot to put our wagons. A lovely green field with a river running through it and plenty of wood for the fire. He knew a man that owned a riding school and needed his horses shod, thirty of them – Just three mile away and he would pay us £40 a horse. So we did fifteen horses each in the time that we were there.

The owner asked us to pull on his land to be on the job but we declined as we were happy to stay where we were. Helen would bring us sandwiches and two flasks of tea around midday and then we would finish for the day about 6pm.

When we got back we would have a wash – eat supper then go to sleep as we were that tired. It was hard work shoeing horses as we had to make them, clean, rasp and fit them

Not every horse has got the same temperament. Some are kicking and struggling, it really takes it out of you. So I was more than happy when we had finished the job. It was totally different from shoeing my own horses as I was used to the temperament and visa-versa they were used to me.

We had a lot of visitors while we were there and did a bit of dealing and trading with horses but never our wagon horse because a good pulling horse is hard to come by as you could put an unknown horse in the shafts of your wagon and it could just run and not stop or kick the wagon to pieces as I myself have experienced such a thing.

A wagon horse is totally different to a cart or riding horse – or some will just lay down and not move – So the years of experience has taught me never to judge a book by its cover and always be a bit wary of a new horse when you've got kids.

My son was always going on at me to build him a miniature wagon for himself but I never had the time. So it was on a Sunday morning that I started to build it. I already had the wood for the hedge boards – Got some wood off the side of the road where someone had fly-tipped and bought the rest. It took about two weeks to make as it was two of us doing it. My father-in-law and I. I then contacted a wagon painter. She told me that it was going to cost twenty-six hundred pound as I wanted it the same as my wagon. She took it with her and brought it back six weeks later – It was beautiful – gold leaf – grapes – running horses – everything was exactly the same as mine. From inside to outside. Even the kettle box – the cratch and axle casing. It looked a sight. My son loved it. I even got a set of miniature harness made for it – A few days later he was upset with me. So I asked him why – He says, what good is it without a horse and not any horse as it had to be a coloured horse but I did not want a small pony at that time because we would not have been able to travel long journeys but I got him one just three weeks before the Appleby Horse Fair.

But one morning I was moving the horses and saw a goat tethered next to them. Wyndham came running toward me saying that he was looking after it for a huge fighting man so I mustn't let it go – I thought, what a load of crap this boy is feeding me with – and goes to his mam. Then she tells me that he'd had it a couple of days – But I let him keep it, much to my regret as a few weeks later it chewed on my best harness.

While at the fair I met new and old friends and enemies of course and watched fights at the pit.

I swapped my London cart for a Bradford trolley which was nicely carved and painted with a kettlebox on the back undercarriage (The cradle) which I bought and sold for another one and I bought a Yurt which is a tent sort of thing. It was round and very easy to put together as it opened up like trellis – Just what I needed for myself – To make wagons when raining I put a wood burning stove in it – It only took twenty minutes to put together and fifteen minutes to take down.

Leaving the fair we were loaded up with a load of rubbish – On the cart – In the cart – We had dogs, chickens – ferrets and a poxy goat which was having a kid. I thought to myself, they have got to go. I came back one Sunday to find it had destroyed a set of my best harness – silver buckles and all. So I chased it off up a field but the ugly thing came back at night and did it again but this time it chewed our Wyndham's harness.

So only then that he decided to give it away – He ended up swapping it for a Norfolk Terrier which ended up being the best rabbiting and hedghogging dog we had. It would go off on its own and bring a rabbit back – At the fair he could have sold his miniature wagon and horse no end of times. One man offered him seven thousand pounds and another offered him three thousand and a Gypsy Vanna but he declined the offers as he really loved his wagon but I would not have let him sell it anyway – As he was only six years old at the time but wasn't daft neither.

I would have loved to have my own wagon when at his age – As we – My brothers and I was lucky to sleep inside. As we made do with a tent or underneath the wagon with a sheet pulled around the bottom to stop the wind and was made to work in the fields – All sorts of farm work – But we loved it. We'd start 6am – stop at 9am. A fire would be made so Mam could make breakfast – Start work again until dinner, some of the other children would sneak off and have fun around the farm but not the older one.

Non-gypsy. We enjoyed ourselves the four days we were there. Wyndham bought himself a few bantams for the eggs and a nanny goat that I never knew about until we were leaving the fire four days later. I'll water the horses he'd say and would insist on doing so. We were led to believe gorjas were bad people that would take us away – Just like gorjas parents would say to their kids – The gypsies will rob and take you away if you are naughty – Our parents would say the same about gorjas – But it really happened to gypsies in the 50's and 60's – I can remember at the age of eight years old when my younger sister came back crying because a man had smacked her across the face because she went into his garden to get her ball back and came over to the wagons and shouting that he'd fight everyone – So my dad says to him, you don't need to fight everyone – Just me. So shut your mouth and put them up. My dad hit him and his pals for slapping my sister. As that was one thing my dad and mam would never allow. Anyone hitting his children. The gorja went away and came back with the police and told us we must move there and then even though the owner gave us permission to stay – As my dad told him this the policeman just kicked the fire over us children. The flame caught my sister's dress and was in flames. My mam poured a bucket of water over her and took her to hospital and she suffered terrible burns to her legs and the policeman said we should all be burned alive. Every last gypsy. My uncle then broke his jaw and went to prison.

My uncle always says that it was well worth it and has seen the same policeman on a few occasions and reminds him about his jaw and asks him does he want it again.

We were nearing Stoke-on-Trent. It was getting dark, so we pulled into a rather narrow grass verge for the night – Helen went off to the closest house to ask for water for the horses – Wyndham got a fire going while I unharnessed the horses and tethered them – We all had supper then settled in for the night.

I got up about 5.30 am to check on the horses and found one of them had broken off the tether – I tracked it for about fifteen minutes and found it in a garden eating grass and flowers – So I apologised for the inconvenience. He wasn't too upset, so I left. I got back to the wagon – Made breakfast and got Helen and Wyndham out of bed – They weren't too pleased with me about it but I wanted to get an early start with less traffic.

As we were getting off the verge one of the tracers snapped and made this loud noise which scared the horse and he bolted at full gallop. I was at it's head trying to stop it – Keeping its head down – It was just dragging me- I couldn't let go as the wagon would have ran over me. So I was in a sticky situation. As this was going on I was thinking to myself, thank God Wyndham was on the cart with his mam because sometimes he would stay in bed if we moved too early and then all of a sudden the mare stopped.

I calmed her down then took her out of the shafts to repair the tracer and let Helen catch me up.

I no sooner fixed the problem when Wyndham said that one of the horses had thrown a shoe – That's all I needed – We went for about three mile then found a pulled in to put the shoe back on and check the others.

It was a nice pull in with plenty of grass and water – I was thinking of staying a night there but thought different of it as we had not come far – So we had a quick cup of tea and left – Everything went easy after that little incident – We stopped at a shop. We were thirsty. While I was waiting outside a Landrover pulled up and a farmer walked over to me and says, are you here for work – If so I have work for you and a place to put the wagon and horses – I accepted his offer – He gave me the name of the farm. I knew the farm well but never worked on it. It was repairing fences – We got to the farm, so I pulled the wagon into a lovely apple orchard. We couldn't wait for the weekend because Saturday and Sunday belonged to us children – We'd go swimming – Go to the market and we'd set up a race course for the horses – We'd gallop and trot them in carts. We could do almost what we wanted except one thing and that was strictly taboo and that's playing or fighting with the 'gorjas'.

We were descending a little hill when his dog saw a rabbit in a hedge and jumped down out of the wagon and in doing so knocked the reins out of his hands and startled the horse which made him slip and his leg was under the wheel. Then his wife jumped down to come to his aide and sprained her ankle. So he was a broken leg and she was a swollen and sprained ankle but he still didn't give up, which I thought he would but the next day he came to the fire where I was having dinner and asked me to sell him the wagon but not the mare as good wagon pulling horses are very hard to find but I didn't want him to put any horse between the shafts as he had a wife and three children. So I told him to get a thick-legged two year old which hasn't been ridden or drove because it wouldn't have any bad habits – Because if too many people have owned a horse it would have been shown lots of different things which is not a good thing – As it is very good to know every move and everything about your horse and your horse will get to know your ways as well. At that time I knew my father-in-law had a few horses but one in particular – a two year old thick half dales mare cobb that would make a very good wagon horse with the right training – She had a good temperament and would make about fourteen hands and like a tank, you could not see her hooves through the tether she had. Her tail was down to the floor and she had a double main. You could just see what she was going to look like in a year's time. So he bought the horse and borrowed mine until his was ready – We went our own way and met up at Stow Fare. Just over a year and his dales mare looked as I knew she would if not better. He asked me where could he find a stallion to put with her as he wanted a foal out of her which I told him was a bad idea because it was his only horse – So he couldn't work her as much and when she did have a foal it would be hard for him to travel as you can't tie a foal to the wagon to follow or beside it's mother as it could get ran over. Si he thought on it – decided against it. He asked me was I going to take my mare back and as he was saying it

The work lasted six weeks – The farmer let me go rabbiting when I liked and take an odd pheasant now and again. Helen did not want to leave as she had friends and relatives there. As well as us, Helen was working –apple picking – she would mostly finish before me and have something to eat ready. We left the farm much fatter and a little richer.

I did not want to go far at the time as I was building another wagon for a friend of mine who was living in Stoke-on-Trent. As he and his three kids liked the wagon life and was going to sell his house and car but I told him not to do so until he was sure if that is what he really wanted – So I came in with an idea – to make a wagon that he could lend and a really good sound horse to pull it – And travel around with me to show him the ropes – Get used to it.

I made the wagon within two months and he moved in quite eagerly – He was very keen and a quick learner – His wife and children loved it. He had quite a few hiccups and snags along the way.



Back In The Day

When I was a kid I lived in traveller sites and moved from camp to camp and it was good. How can I describe it for you non- travellers to understand. Imagine changing your back garden every few weeks. I liked to explore, as most kids do, and I loved finding something new every time I went out to play. I remember waking up and going outside the trailer and my gran and granddad would be by the camp fire with the kettle and pot on the fire so that us kids could wake up and start the day with a cup of hot tea and a bowl of soup. My gran would put the milk, sugar and tea in the kettle and let it stew. It always tasted nice. My granddad would go round all the trailers on the site collecting a few spuds here and a bit of meat there until he had enough for the pot, then every kid on the site could come and get a bowl. I learned at an early age that if I got up early and caught something for the pot like a duck, a rabbit or a fish I could then go for most of the day and do what I liked. This was right up my street. I learned to look after myself. I got a ferret and a net at a very early age and soon became very good at catching rabbits. I realised then that I could live off the land if need be and never be without a meal. My granddad also made me a catapult and soon I was a good shot able to hit a wood pigeon, duck or a pheasant or anything else I shot at. I was also good at setting snares and fishing too. I would set my snares at night and go and check them the next day and if I was lucky I would get something for the pot and the day would be mine. If they were empty I would have to go fishing or ferreting, which I didn't mind to do and if that failed I would use my catapult and that resulted in me getting something.

This side of the traveller life was good but what I didn't like was when the police turned up to make us move from our camps. When this happened most of the men folk would disappear and leave the women and kids behind. The men were not wanted by the police but it was because we did not trust them and they knew they would get locked up as they could not just stand there and watch the police and bailiffs beat their families up as this is what happened every time they moved us on. There were no official sites as there are today back in the 70's.. This is why I probably have so much hatred for authority today. When I got older I used to try and help

my mam fight the police but I realised that this was making it harder for her and not helping as she would have to fight harder to stop us getting hurt. We moved camps a lot in those days, visiting the same sites at different times of the year. Many were to work on different farms in different seasons. One such site we called the Christmas car park. It was really a lorry park and we kids loved it. There were always things we could get hold of. One time that sticks in my mind was when we found a lorry full of tins of paint. And myself, my brother and a friend got as many tins as we could carry and painted all the windows of the local school white. The police however, turned up and although we got away our mams gave us a good hiding. Once we found a lorry that was backed up so close to a wall that you could not get in it. Inside were boxes of sweets and biscuits.. I was the only one small enough to get in, so I squeezed in and managed to pass the sweets out to the others. I also ate a lot myself. When it came to leave after about twenty minutes I could not get out. I was stuck. The two other boys were frightened to tell their mams or they would kill them, so without thinking it through they phoned the fire brigade who turned up with a police car. This was the first time I got locked up. My brother Ben and Jimmy went back to the trailers and acted as if they had nothing to do with it but my mam saw straight through that and gave them both a hiding for leaving me locked up. They never did it again.



Jonboy's Story

My name is Jonboy and with over twenty five bare knuckle fights under my belt, I am well known to the map. We've always been around Wales but a lot of my Dad's family come from the Midlands way over in England. We moves around a lot but when I'm in Wales I'm registered as a L and D company- that is landscapes and driveways. The story I am going to tell you happened in 2007 and has been retold many times among travellers to this day.

It was just coming up winter with the frost on the ground and the wind was cutting our eyes out. I was out hawking me wares and giving out quotes and I said to myself that things were getting quiet when me mam rings and says this man has rung and he wants me to do a job for him tomorrow. I phone him and we agree and I ask me daddy to come too.

The next morning I'm getting the tools in the van when me daddy turns up. He's smoking a fag and coughing away. Everyone will tell you he has asthma but he will not give up smoking – not for love or money.

My dad feels the cold and always wears an old trilby but today he was wearing a Russian style hat with pull down, sheep's wool ear flaps. He had on about ten layers of clothes too. He always wears loads as he can't get warm.

Among us travellers he is known as the Eskimo. We went to the job and I realised I was going to need a second truck so while I'm sorting stuff out, me daddy goes knocking on a few doors. After a while he comes back and says 'O my boy tis cold and as for calling no one got no lover up'. This man however, was walking up the street and watching us. I says to me daddy go ask him. So my daddy gets chitty for a good half hour but comes back and says 'the man could not even offer me a cup of tea, he told me he could see how cold I was with all them coats on but I aint got the money to pay the bills let alone buy tea.'

Me daddy says to him, 'How have you got such a new camper on the drive then?'

The man replies 'It's that that's got me in so much trouble- I took a loan out to pay for it and now the missus has left me.'

Me daddy says ' Then sell me this camper and it will put everything to right. You can then get yourself a sports car and you'll have all the ladies after you.

My daddy left him to think about it and the man goes to look at the camper.

Me daddy doesn't say much to me but I'm thinking 'What does he want that old camper for? Anyway I finishes up my old job and me daddy goes back over to chat with the fellow. I drive over to them and they are doing a deal. Me daddy's saying 'that's me last offer go and gets the paperwork cos we gotta get going.'

When the deal is in the bag, we gotta pull her back onto the road. I had no rope with me so I goes in my truck and cuts out the seat belts and ties them together. But it was not that simple as the four wheels are seized. The fella we bought it from is now having second thoughts and wants us to put it back on his drive but me daddy's having none of it. I started dragging the van and me daddy's banging the wheels with a lump hammer to try and loosen them up. As I'm driving all I can see out my mirror is this hammer banging away and I can hear me daddy shouting. With all the noise I cant understand him so I slows down.

'No keep going ' he shouts 'Don't stop.' All the time me daddy's going on bout how cold it is but soon we are able to get it moving freely.

We decide that if we are going to sell the camper we will need to change the engine over so we take it to my place so I can work on it. There are a lot of vehicles at my place so my missus has to move the vans around to make room for it. As we were all reversing and pushing the cars about a board flew up under the wheels of the van but no one noticed it.

'Right ' says me daddy 'I'm off home. I'll speaks to you in the morning.'

When he'd gone I went into the house to have tea with the women folk and my kids. I hadn't been there long when my phone rings and this fellow says I want to buy the camper now. I have the money.

I phone me daddy who says he will be there shortly as we need to swap the batteries over and get it cleaned before he comes "I've talked this camper up to this fellow" says me daddy "We need to work quickly". So when me daddy arrives with my mammy too they set about it but there is no time to swap the batteries so we will have to 'jump' it.. So me daddy gets these heavy duty leads and is up on the bonnet of me mammy's car fixing it to the camper. They rev away but it still wont start as it's been left too long. After a while my mammy says 'I've had enough, I'm going in the house to have some tea' and she leaves. I remember looking through the window and seeing them all in the warm, drinking tea and chatting away while I was out in the cold listening to me daddy coughing his guts up and talking to himself about the battery. I think I'll give it one last go and suddenly the engine turns a couple of times making a loud noise and moves forward. I remember hearing me daddy saying, very faintly. "O My God! I'm gone!" I slowly backs the camper up and when I gets out of the driving seat and Looks round I couldn't see him anywhere. So I was thinking he has gone in the house drinking tea, after all he's been complaining about the cold all day. But when I went in the house he was not there either and me mammy says he's probably had enough and gone home. But when I went outside I saw his car was still there so he must be here somewhere. I looked up the road but he was not to be seen. As I was walking round the camper van I heard a faint like rustling noise but could not work out where it had come from. I looked under the van and there to my surprise was what I thought was a hedgehog. When I gets closer I realise it is my daddy's Russian hat and my Daddy has fallen down the drain. The board that flew up when my wife was moving the blue van had been covering the drain which was about a twenty foot drop. The way he had fallen was with one leg down and the other one up. His boot was almost in his face. I must say when I first saw him I could not stop laughing. I'm like that when I start I can't stop. He shouts up at me 'When I gets out I'm gonna kill you,' but I was laughing so much my belly was sore. Anyways, I gets him out and then goes to find my mammy.

When I tells her she starts laughing too but when we gets to the old boy, he is sitting there having a fag, and he gives us a look. My daddy's an old fashioned gypsy man of few words instead he says a lot with his eyes and the look he was giving us told us to stop.

Me Mammy says she is gonna have to take him to hospital. Well everyone knows you will not get a gypsy man to a doctor let alone a hospital Me daddy is refusing to go. So me mammy says-'let's go in the cara and have a look.' Well , she's not been in there long when she comes out and says he has hurt himself badly ...down there!

So me Mammy gets him in the car but he can't sit properly as he is in pain and takes him away. After an hour or so I starts to get worried as I hear nothing and my kids keep going on bout their grand dad so I rings me mammy. She tells me that it's not good and he has to see a special surgeon who is driving from England in the next hour or so. So I gets in my car and drives over. When I gets there he is sitting in bed wearing this blue nightie thing that the hospital have given him. I starts to talk to him but again I can't keep a straight face and me daddy tries to grab me. When the surgeon arrives he tells me to go and I realise this is bad.

After a couple of days they let him go home and when I go and see him he is still all propped up on cushions he is an upset man not only cos I been laughing at him but because he feels ashamed that he has been in hospital cos that's how old fashioned gypsy men are. Anyways, he did get better, thanks be to God! But you will still hear the story if ever you go in any traveller pub and gets a few pints inside you about the time me daddy 'disappeared'.



Sitting on a horse he was. A horse fair it is.

I was not decided if I wanted to come to Stow-on-the-Wold gypsy horse fair today. The feeling of reluctancy was attempting to overwhelm my bones with various reasons why I should not bother. Amongst many disconnected thoughts my significant doubt came directly out of what I'd said to Troy my son months ago when we were really too tired to think after Appleby fair.

We rolled out of our beds at early and made a considerable effort to travel to the fair in charming North England's West Moorland hills on the banks of the river of Eden where the ; exquisite , vibrant, colourfully evocative gypsy traveller gathering at Appleby happens annually in June since the 15th century. We go every year we can and Troy being born on June the 1st was a six day old babe in arms when he first come with me.

This time I had organised a field from Ryan Smith a mile out along the lanes where we could pull to and bide for the fair. We were loading our horse Cosmo and tying the cart on the back of the trailer at seven in the morning the day we left. On the roof rack of my old Audi diesel were two bundles of long hazel poles, with leaves stripped off about an inch and a half thick at the base, and average 12feet long which we were going to use as our bender tents' frame poles. From our homelands in Mid- Wales we had a journey of 130 miles to cover which usually takes a few hours, on mainly motorways until the last thirty miles of over hill and down dales of bendy country roads and lanes. Cosmo would be looking through his little peeping glass trying to work out where he was going and I could spy him through my rear view door mirror on the car, his presence was acting as a constant reminder to me to drive carefully with an important horse and the precious son as very special cargo. The journey seemed to be taking longer than usual and far more intense.

“Did you pack the blankets and mattresses Troy ,’cos I know I didn’t...I’ve just remembered ?”

I said suddenly slightly anxious as I went through a check list of what I had loaded in to the rig before we had left home.

“No I thought you had!” was his reply.

In our rush to load everything we’d forgotten to go back into the cottage one last time and get the bedding.

“I can’t remember everything! I must have been distracted loading Cosmo. What we going to do now then?” this was met with a deathly silence from Tice as the blame was flying about in the car. I was grumbling and was more than a bit disconcerted to the point that I muttered a few curses, but recognizing no one was to blame quickly pulled myself together.

“We’re going to have to turn off and find somewhere to buy some quilts in that case Dad!”

We would have to turn off the motorway first opportunity and hopefully drive to a shop where we can get new. Oh well shit happens at least we still can find somewhere to buy from not being too far in to the remote country where we are going I thought. Flipping on the cars indicator we left the known route and descended into the unknown territory of: Leyland, Lancashire with a heightened sense of trepidation .

“Keep your eyes open for somewhere son”

Troy adjusted himself in the car seat sat up and was looking all about. Luckily enough though the road just seem to gravitate through the high street toward an oversized car park of a Tesco super store. As I spun the rig around and pulled up at the back into three spaces.

“Keep Cosmo quiet open his top door and give him some hay and a sip, would you please and mind the car too” I shouted back to Troy over my shoulder as I jogged toward the architectural giant.

I hate shopping at the best of times so I was not intending to linger . I approached a thin lady in a Tesco uniform that was either for a larger woman or else the wearer had shrunk by the sheer force of work inside the retail hell of a place.

Gaining her attention she swept back her lank black hair and pushed back her glasses that had slipped down her nose as she had been crouching down as she stacked or was pretending to the bottom shelf with plastic beakers and cutlery.

“Do you sell quilts please and can you point me to where they are if you do please?”

She smiled a thin little smile and urged me to follow her to the section. I checked out three minutes later loaded with duvets, pillows a camp and a blow up mattress grabbing a couple of cans of pop . I produced a credit card and £56.30 was mysteriously swallowed up out of my account. As I sauntered back to the rig and thought how easy it was to spend money and not even feel it. Cosmo was amusing himself pulling hay out of a net that was flipped from inside the trailer to the outside and hanging over the door. I threw a pop to Troy who was sitting in the front passenger seat with the door open with his legs and feet out on the pavoir cark park surface.

“Open up the back would you son and I’ll chuck this in and well get gone”

Cosmo looked at me curiously with an underwhelmed expression as I flipped the net in and pushed his head back in the trailer as I pushed shut and latched his top door. Tyso emptied the remainder of a bucket of water he had had given to the horse and put it into the trailer via the little jockey door or the near side front. I looked up and Cosmo was peering out of his peep hole and I got back in and we gracefully drove away.

We arrived late in the afternoon after one more brief stop, the heat of the day had gone, but the engine of the car was hot. With the air conditioning on the atmosphere in the car was static and it was not until I lowered the window to talk to the men at the entrance of Ryans’ field .

“ Pull down to where ever you wanna park, but leave space for the horse and wagons that are arriving in an hour or so ‘cos the Rielly’s are on their way” walked over and told me

“I’ll come over when your set up with Dad after a bit as he’s doing the money alright2

We bumped into the field and the trailer turned and pivoted around after the car in a rolling way over the bumped as we drove down the field which seemed to be already full of; caravans , barrel tops wagons horses, lorries, horses, dogs, children and adults. I stopped once or twice to give way to horses in carts with kids with whips trotting recklessly through the field towards the road shouting at each other.

“Yah, yup and git on.”

I drove the car to a clearing between the camps in the field and turned the trailer right angle to the car to create a protected space for the bender. Troy helps get the cart off the back door of the trailer and we unloaded Cosmo through the large front ramp and staked him out on a tether to eat grass. He wandered to the end of the chain and pulled as tight as he could to get close as he could to the others animals on their chains all about. With good organisation we set up our camp like robots and before late evening we were sitting around a stick fire that Troy had lit whilst I had built the bender sipping cider. Good lad had been foraging for dried dead nettles that he had neatly bundled and in to string tied bales that he was going to use as fire kindling. He pointed out two of the bales under the trailer ‘to keep dry’ whilst we sat eating a simple, wholesome affair of bacon butties, hunks of cheese and handfuls of crisps for supper. Cosmo stood gently chewing his grass with an astonished expression looking at the scores of other coloured horses and ponies doing the same as he. We suddenly noticed the horse prick up their ears and all look in the same direction simultaneously: so we looked over too. The Reilly’s where pulling into the field with three vardos (Gypsy horse drawn caravan) and eight horses three pulling the wagons, one pulling a dray and three mares lead by a lad one with a little fluffy foal at foot.

“Is that your horse mush? A shirtless man on a four wheeled dray shouted in my direction as he drove a lean, muscular horse which

was sweating profusely. Two other men on the cart jumped off as he pulled to stop next to an adjacently parked old wooden sided horse lorry.

“Shorten and move his chain as my stallion here is going back on his which is there look” He pointed to a metal spike with a tangled heavy chain tether attached. In the ground there was a muddled semi-circle of tracking where a horse had been tied and Cosmo’s tether was just overlapping. Although the steel chain wrapped around the metal stake was short if unravelled it would obviously mean if his horse was tied on that they would fight.

“Can you shorten up your horse a bit and I’ll do the same” I said realising the issue.

“No and I was hear first my stallion going to kick the fuck out of yours”

The obviously drunk man was shouting in a Newcastle accent. I thought not to get him upset and did not feel like sacrificing my horse to prove his point: so I acquiesced, making to relocate our gelding’s tether near and over towards the bender. He man put his horse on the other chain and which immediately reared and boxed his front legs out came down and did a double barrel buck with his back legs kicking out at terminal velocity. When the horse had stops this superiority display which included roaring and snorting at the loudest volume it could: he ran to the end of the chain rattling and pulling all the tangled loops out in fast motion till the that moment of anticipation where it snaps taught in a crack as he hits the end and I was thinking hope the chain does not break: luckily it is stout and the horses neck is wrenched around to the side and he starts trotting at the perimeter of his undisputed territory. Cosmo was unaffected and came and stood near our fire. Troy walked over and gave him a pat and scratch on his neck ruffling his long thick black as the animal move his head closer to thank his young master.

“He’ll be right son it’s time to turn”. I said whilst: taking a last look around I could see people in small groups of three or four standing and talking around flaming fires: their shadows projected against the brightly painted wooden caravans illuminated by the flickering flames in the darkness.

We cutched- up Inside our bender tent in our beds I could see Troy was fidgeting about on his bed: it was obvious he was not happy with the bumps and un-level ground which was tactile through the camping mattress as I'd taken the inflatable relatively luxurious blow up one. Before he complained I took pity and told him we'd swap for tonight and maybe change back later: so he'd at least be kushti tonight: bless the good lad. I was alright trading beds as, being used to the 'life' an odd bump or two of the ground would not stop me sleeping well: because I was tired. Once Troy had his new comfy bed he came back to life and busied himself sorting out the little radio and a candle holder. The flickering wax candle was being stubborn and the lad was having problems getting it to fit in the holder.

He picked up the knife and was going to trim it lit and I said I'd do it because melted wax was dripping and he was either going to cut or burn something. I demonstrated how to melt the residual wax on the holder and with another lit candle melt the base of the candle and fuse them together . He was impressed and did the other two the using same technique. The illuminating light of the burning candles flickered inside the bent wooden pole tent with a canvas cover in a; reassuringly, nostalgically, immortal manner, which one could easily imagine infinite universal isolation and literally be anywhere that could be dreamed. As we eventually laid down to sleep and blew out the candles a couple of horses called in the distance as I slipped out of consciousness and drifted into a transcendental world of a medieval king of warriors, maidens and horses. During fair week at Appleby all the routes to and around town are blocked to all but pedestrian or horse transport and due to the isolation of some of the outlaying pubs and sites having your own horse here is essential otherwise you are going to get yourself fit by walking or miss out .As the fair develops the social focus moves from the town on the river to the villages and pubs around the town and beyond in the local area of roughly seven miles from the centre. The main fair gathering happens a mile to the North of the town in the fields and in the lanes around fair hill where the sons and daughters of the travelling nation come to be; reunited,

sell and buy horses. People of all ages from the cradle to the grave meander and mooched about the stalls and caravans amongst the horses in the moment like a pulsation of kindred life always original, never the same, but always colourful as the light when the sun shines at the fair is the most brilliant of the year. Horses of all sizes and colours tied on tethers or loose in large herds are everywhere without exaggerating there are many hundreds of finest beasts in our world. Our Cosmo was amazingly well behaved except for one time he jumped up on all fours in a fly jump with the cart on out of morning excitement and nearly took off down the road at full speed towards a crowd of people, however after we had to take him back out from the queues of horses and carriages amongst the throng of people to the quiet lanes for an eight mile fast trot just to get the fizz off him.

I can honestly say he was faultless and pulled me and Troy many miles that fair. I could have sold him thirty times over, but as he wasn't for sale instead of saying no I'd just yes for £10,000 which was six grand more than he was worth so it worked out well as a conversation killer. The four days and nights we stay there was epic and each day I was buying and selling bit and pieces of tack and harness. I just narrowly avoided trading our cart for a less good one in a swap when I was drunk one night outside the pub. Good thing must come to pass and when we pulled are selves together one morning we packed for home. The amazing fun we had had was enough of a reminder of what life is like living back on the drom (road) to satisfy any imaginable wonder lust for that moment and for the imaginable future as we were exhausted, running on reserve. Still regardless of our fatigued intentions we both could not help saying to all our friends we had made and old cousins of the travelling nation.

"See you at the next fair kushti bok (good luck) and farewell".

No one ever knows what will happens on the road it really is the great out there, however we all imagine that all roads lead to roam so it's to heaven we hope and to hell we fear.

Four Pieces

Cousin

When we was back in school we were called vicious names. I've lost a lot of family due to name calling. Some of them can't take it. I lost a cousin. About 20 years ago. Nice boy. He was great he was. We grew up together. One day he went off on his own and he didn't come back. And everybody was looking, three or four days and the police didn't seem bothered. When we said he came from a travelling community, it seemed to me the police didn't care as much as they should have. In them days they just didn't care because they didn't want travellers around. Because some travellers are not very nice because they have caused a lot of problems but travellers are generally nice, genuine people but because he was obviously a Traveller they just didn't want to look for him. A couple of weeks went by and we still didn't hear nothing. We were all searching for him in the night, none of us were sleeping, none of us had seen him, we were just searching all the time. One of my uncles found him, hanging.

Self-harmer he was, He had so much grief you know in his life. He didn't open up, he didn't talk to anybody. When people confronted him and said what's the matter boy, come and tell us, he'd say, no, nothing's wrong, I'd say if it was wrong, I'm ok, I'm ok. But something was eating him up inside and he was bullied like, quite bad, when he was in school, going back and forth to college. He was doing a plumbing course, he was doing really well, going to school, catching up on his reading and writing and college a couple of days a week but everybody knew something was up with him but he just wasn't opening up. I wouldn't say he was a loner 'cause he wasn't he was a very nice boy but he'd come home and he'd just sit in my trailer for a bit. We'd have a little whiskey or something, have some of this I'd say, it'll warm you up boy and he'd just sit there and he wouldn't talk. And I'd think to myself all I wanted was for him to talk.

I struggled in school too, I used to get bullied chronic. My grandfather said to me, I'm sticking you up in Merlin's Bridge, used to be a boxing club. I don't like this, I said to him. Tell you what, he said, I'll put you in Penna Boxing Club, you'll have to go there and I enjoyed it and everybody knew then I was boxing and they thought oh no, we don't want to do this anymore, fight him and that's the way it was. The way in life and growing up but nowadays it's a helluva lot different from when we were youngsters.

A couple of years ago one of the Delaney's, Delaney family, their son got kicked to death. He was only nine years old and he was kicked to death by three teenagers. They bullied him for years. But since that happened the Traveller community have come together and the police respect us a lot more now. But why did it have to come to violence to make things better.

Phone

I remember back in Swansea in 2008 and I didn't know of any Travellers in Swansea jail at the time. I got stopped one day on the phone. We can talk fast on the phone. It's the way we are. We can word things that don't seem right to local officers. Nothing bad. We're not saying anything out of order. It's just the way we word things. An officer tapped me on the shoulder and said, 'Listen when you're finished on the phone come and have a chat with me in the office please.'

Yeah, yeah, I said, not a problem. Why what's up?

'We haven't got an interpreter for your language, can you please stop talking like that.'

I said, some of my family, can't even speak English, so it's easier for me to talk the way I talk than talk to them in English because they wouldn't understand what I'm saying.

He said, I don't care.

I said, but ok, not a problem boss, we'll leave it like that

When I first came to jail there was nothing in place for Travellers but now there is.

Community

I had a bit of a bad time with my mum and it wasn't going too good so my grandmother stepped in and there was twelve of us mind. My grandmother said right, I'm taking these boys to live on the site with me. I was only about six but I noticed I was different and my grandmother saw there was something up with me and she took me aside and said, what's wrong with you my boy and I said, I feel left out and she said why d'you feel left out? I said, because I'm the only one here who has got blue eyes and blonde hair, I said, the rest of us have got black hair and brown eyes and dark skin and she said, don't worry about what anyone says. You're my boy, she used to say, don't worry about what anyone thinks, you are part of my community and what she was telling me was true. All I wanted as a boy was to feel safe. When my grandmother adopted me into that area it was so marvellous. I couldn't have asked for better

We live on an old quarry my family. There's a 185 of us living down there. It's a big community. How it all started my grandmother was a Romanian Traveller and she met my grandfather in the early thirties, obviously she was young then, very young. My grandfather's family had moved from Ireland and into the Pembrokeshire area. So it mainly started with the Boswells. That's how it all started off, that's my belief.

The Boswells are everywhere, you've even got Boswells in America and in India. There used to be a footballer in America, Bobby Boswell and I used to ask my grandmother if he was one us and she would say no but I wanted to know because I loved my football. I was one of the first Travellers in my community to have a football trial. My grandfather has always been a horseman. He loves his horses. He'd go down the stable down Pembroke Dock and stay there all day. He'd say if the boy wants to play football he can play football but he has to come down and work for me first but my Grandmother said, no, if he wants to play football, he goes to play football and so I did and they were all proud of me.

Settling Things

When you talk to some people they go, why do you go fighting? We only do it because it settles a lot of arguments. Say for example one family, they rob from us, instead of us going to the police, we'll go to them and we'll fight one of their members of the family and it settles it. Alright, it is wrong but it's the way things are settled in our community. It's been a tradition for so many years, generations. My step-father was brought up in Dublin, in Tipperary and my grandfather was brought up in Ireland too and they have had many fights between families to settle things. We don't like going to the police. You just go up there, sort it out and a fair fight whoever wins. Say my family wins or their family wins, then shake hands, go out for a drink after, it's done.



Afterword

I worked with the Traveller Group in Parc prison three years ago on a booklet they wanted to produce to celebrate Traveller History Month. During the first session, one of the guys told me that Travellers had been known in the past as Scatterers and Roamers, he told me about their history and beliefs of being descended from lost tribes from Egypt.

In the couple of hours of sitting and chatting to these men a lot of my preconceptions on what it was to be a Traveller had already fallen away. I heard about a community with a rich heritage, its own language and a set of values that in many societies in Britain have long been eroded and discarded. A community that looks after it's elderly and lives off the land. Where family is vital to living. Where men still settle things in the time honoured tradition that men used to, with their fists.

Of course these values can clash with the law of the land and this clash can often create barriers between us. This is inevitable when you have a society existing within a society and as the pressures of modern life continue to grow, then we are perhaps looking at a way of life that is already on the wane.

I think the contents of this book go some way to bringing down some of those barriers and may take away some of the readers pre-conceptions of what it means to be a Traveller.

The Scatterers have sometimes found fertile ground, other times stony ground. The nature of travelling is a sense of the unexpected being just around the corner but long may the Scatterers continue on the open road.

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This beautiful model of a trailer was made in the woodwork department of HMP Parc by one of the writers of this book . Meticulously detailed, both inside and out, this model was created without any plans.

