

IRISH TRAVELLERS

INTRODUCTION - OUR HISTORY

My name is Eileen. I am in Year 6 at 'Our Lady of Reconciliation Catholic Primary School in Eldon Place. I am a member of a group of Irish Travellers who have settled for a while in Liverpool. Some people call us Irish Tinkers or Gypsies, but our proper name is Irish Travellers.



We are very proud of our long history that goes back into the mists of time. Our ancestors were travelling poets and musicians. They wandered from place to place. By day they sold baskets, blankets, rugs, pots and pans to the poor people who lived in tiny villages.



By night they entertained the wealthy lords and ladies of Ireland in their castles and grand houses. Their stories are part of Ireland's great folklore and the music they played is still played today.

One day, in the year 1172, more than 800 years ago, the King of England, Henry the Second landed on the coast of Ireland. Gradually he took the lands and homes of the great Irish Lords and ladies. The English did not like our ancestors' tales of glory, or their mythical stories and plaintive songs, so the 'Travellers' were banished from the castles and grand houses, which were now owned by English barons, lords and knights.

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

Our ancestors were still able to make their living selling household items to the village people, and they still travelled the length and breadth of Ireland, but they did not feel as welcome as before. The settled villagers and townsfolk began to call them names such as Tinker or Pedlar and would warn their children not to play with them.

Even though life was difficult for our ancestors, they still kept to their wandering or nomadic way of life. In those days they lived in horse drawn caravans, which is why we sometimes get confused with gypsies, who also lived in caravans. But gypsies came from India and travelled through most of Europe. Not many gypsies made the perilous journey across to Ireland.

During the 1840's a terrible potato famine hit Ireland. Hundreds of thousands of Irish people starved to death. Those who didn't starve made their way to England or America. Liverpool was a very popular destination for the starving poor of Ireland because it was one of the nearest seaports just across the Irish Sea.

In our history lessons we found out this interesting fact. During the first three months of 1847 (just over 150 years ago) 144,000 Irish people arrived in Liverpool. Perhaps we share some common ancestors with your families?



REMEMBERING GENOCIDES
LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE





HOLOCAUST
MEMORIAL DAY

COMING TO LIVERPOOL

Different Irish Traveller families have been coming to Liverpool since the days of the Irish famine. But of course they didn't settle down to live in houses like the families of your ancestors. Instead they carried on with their old traditions and preferred to wander the country, never staying in one place too long, and always happy to travel back to their roots in Ireland.

Our families do just the same today. We don't live in horse drawn caravans any more; we live in trailers, which are hooked on to the backs of our cars. But we still travel up and down the country and still go back to Ireland whenever we can. Our families love the fact that they can go anywhere in the world using their trailers.

Some cities, like Liverpool, have special sites for the Travellers. We pay rent for our 'spot' just like many of you do when you go on a caravan holiday. If we are lucky, there are good facilities at the site, like showers, toilet blocks and proper rubbish disposal units.

It is great when we find a proper council site because our trailers don't have showers, only small basins to wash your hands in. When we arrive at a site with bad facilities we all have to go to the swimming baths on a Sunday. There we can have a proper shower to help us get ready for school the next day. It's also really difficult to dispose of our rubbish properly, because sometimes councils don't collect it regularly.



STAYING IN LIVERPOOL

Most of the families who live on the Traveller site in Liverpool arrived about two years ago. We had been living on a Traveller site in the Midlands where some of our families found work putting the block paving down. We also used to look for the copper and scrap metal that people left behind. This is great work because you can get good money from scrap or salvage yards when you bring them what you have found.

Margaret, who is in Year 4 at our school, loves helping her dad look for scrap. She used to go with him every Sunday and was the best at finding proper copper!

Our new site in Oil Street didn't have very good facilities but we all liked it because:

- Our families and relatives can all fit on the one site
- Nobody has tried to kick us off the site, and hardly anyone calls us names - only people who don't know us shout out 'gypo'
- It's close to the ferry so we can go across to Ireland to visit our grandparents





HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

- It's close to Ellesmere Port, where some of our relatives have given up travelling and have lived for a long time in the one place
- The children and teachers at the two nearest schools are very nice to us and we have all learned to do our work really well
- Some of us could make our 'First Communion' which is very important for us and for our Mums and Dads
- The Council promised us that we would be able to move to a brand new site with proper facilities

STAYING IN LIVERPOOL

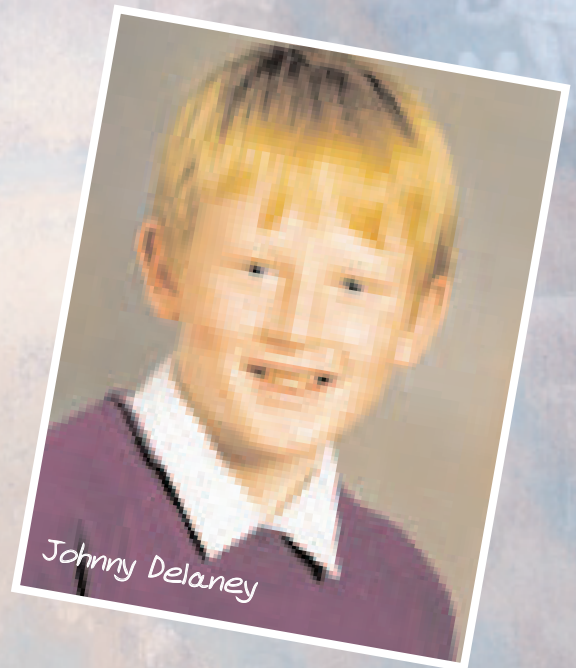
It is hard to believe how quickly the time has passed since our families, the Delaneys, the Tooeyes, and the Dorans, came and settled at the Oil Street Site. Most of us go to school properly now, although our elder brothers and sisters have left school to work with our dads and uncles, putting down block paving or laying tarmac paths.

We all get on great. After school we play together on the site. Our favourite game is 'Tig off the Ground' or 'Squashed tomatoes!' You've probably played them too. With the first game, if you don't want to get tiggged you have to jump on something that is off the ground. With 'Squashed tomatoes' you have to kneel down and say 'Squashed tomatoes' if the person who is 'on' tries to 'tig' you.



A VERY SAD EVENT

Johnny was the best person to play with. Although he was 15 years old, he loved joining in. He always made sure that everyone took their turns and that no one got too silly. Our parents loved it when Johnny played with us, because he made sure that we are all safe and would stop any of us from running out into the road or climbing up onto dangerous walls and fences.



One weekend, a few months ago, Johnny went over to Ellesmere Port to visit some of our relatives who had settled there. Johnny's Mum didn't want him to go because we were all on holiday from school and she wanted him to play with us instead.

Anyway Johnny did go with his friends to Ellesmere Port. They went to buy some sweets from a shop and then a dreadful thing happened. Some other boys who aren't Irish Travellers heard them talking. These boys didn't like Johnny's Irish accent. They started saying horrible things to Johnny and his friends and called them names. Johnny and his friends took no notice, but then the boys started chasing them. Poor Johnny fell over and couldn't get away in time. The boys started kicking him while he was lying on the ground. There were five boys and only one Johnny. They kicked and kicked and kicked. Then, when Johnny was lying still on the ground, they ran away. One of them was heard saying, 'He deserved it, he was only a gypsy.'

Back home we were all waiting for Johnny, and his sister was crying because she had been so looking forward to playing with him. But Johnny never came back from Ellesmere Port. Our mums and dads told us that the boys had kicked Johnny so hard that his heart had stopped with fright and that he was dead.

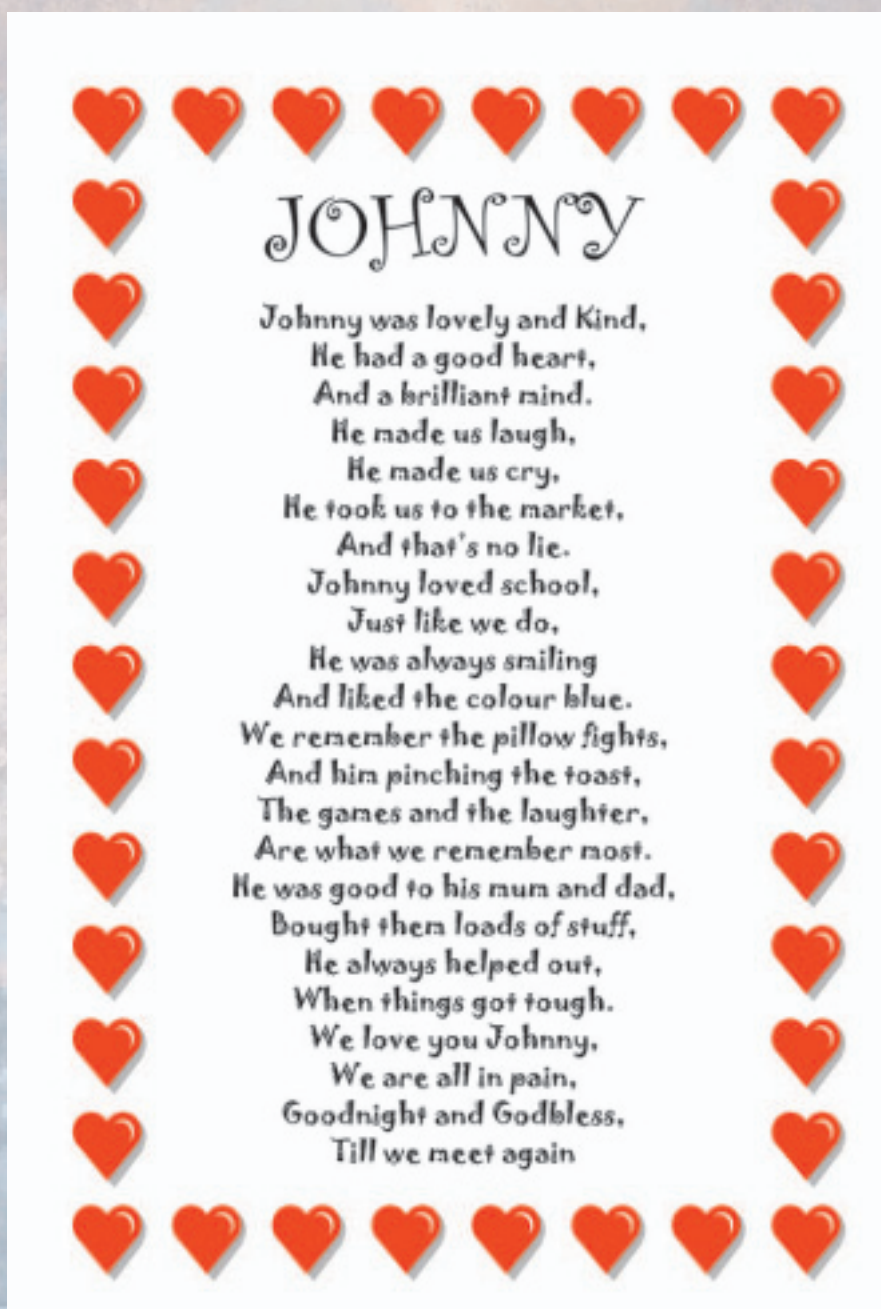




HOLOCAUST
MEMORIAL DAY

Most nights we pray to Johnny because we know he was so good that he would have gone to heaven. Johnny had never hurt even a fly. He was the best looking, kindest, gentlest big brother and cousin you could possibly wish for. He had a dog called 'Lady' and his favourite pop group was Westlife'.

Johnny always said that his favourite song was 'If Tomorrow Never Comes'. That song was sung at Johnny's funeral and some of us wrote a poem about Johnny, which was read out. Here it is now:



JOHNNY

Johnny was lovely and Kind,
He had a good heart,
And a brilliant mind.
He made us laugh,
He made us cry,
He took us to the market,
And that's no lie.
Johnny loved school,
Just like we do,
He was always smiling
And liked the colour blue.
We remember the pillow fights,
And him pinching the toast,
The games and the laughter,
Are what we remember most.
He was good to his mum and dad,
Bought them loads of stuff,
He always helped out,
When things got tough.
We love you Johnny,
We are all in pain,
Goodnight and Godbless,
Till we meet again

