

Romany Theatre Company

Atching Tan Project

Reminiscence Interview – Transcription of Edited Interview

Date of Interview		Interviewer	Interviewee	Age Range of Interviewee	Duration of Edited Recording
25-11-09		Sinead	Paul	60-65	12:25
Key timing	Initial of person speaking	Transcription of Interview			
00:00	Paul	<p>My name is Paul Stevens. I'm 61, coming on 62. I was born, we think 1948; we're not 100% sure and we're not sure what month it was either, but I do celebrate my birthday in April.</p> <p>Life travelling back when I was on the road was very, very hard. Most people didn't like it. They didn't like the stopping near villages or towns, but we got accepted because my father was a land worker, so we travelled the farms, hedging and ditching and fruit picking and doing whatever work there was on the land. But it was a very hard life. I started work in the fields when I was 6 and my first job was carrying sugar beet in a field that I thought covered the world because it was so big it was huge and we had to work the same hours in the day as what me dad did. Probably about 10 hours a day. We lived in a wagon. We had an old horse drawn (I'm not sure what it was because I've never seen one before, so it was probably just one someone had built). Then we changed over to a van drawn one which wasn't as good as having a horse drawn wagon because it was more exciting living in a horse drawn wagon more fun than living in one that other people were using. It was good it was all right, but horse drawn was preferable than a modern wagon.</p> <p>I think it was about 1958 my father came to Essex to work and we stayed down here ever since. Most of our work was in Kent and Sussex and my grandfather, he was horse dealing and scrap dealing in Kent by the name of Liberty. He changed his name from I don't tell anybody what it was, but he took his wife's name when he married. Took Stevens, which was her name. But he got rid of his name for some unknown reason and note the family don't like it talked about and so we never mention that. But I stopped travelling. I think it was about 1976 (something like that).</p> <p>Things have got better because your more accepted if you live in a house. Although everyone around here knows that I'm a born and bred gypsy. I don't hide the fact, but I think you're accepted more living in a house than you are living in a caravan. So it has got a lot better.</p> <p>Living in a house was very, very hard because you grew up living outside, you know, and as kids we never slept indoors, we always slept under the wagon. When we changed to a modern wagon we still slept outside, so coming into a house was quite strange. You know doors that you shut and heating you could put on and off as you liked and things like that. So it was quite hard, but after about 5 years I got used to it and now I wouldn't leave it.</p> <p>I do miss the open space. Just doing what you want to do when you want to do it and I do miss the people. I still go and see a lot of them, but I do miss the evening groups around the old fire and the drink and just the general life of being a camp you know, being pulled in a lay-by, you're in a field or whatever, its totally different to having friends around your house. You can't enjoy yourself quite so much. I do miss the open road; the open life. The freedom has all gone. That's what I miss is the open road probably, but I'm too old to start again.</p>			
03:42	Sinead Paul	<p>Did you and your family face racism when you were growing up?</p> <p>Terrible, terrible. My dad didn't because I mean he was a fighting man and if anybody said anything he'd hit 'em and they just didn't say it again. As a child, all my family (I've got 3 brothers and a sister) and we all faced it.</p>			
04:02		<p>If you went to a school which I didn't go very often. I only went to school probably a year in the whole of my school life and I shall never forget, I was about 8, I was in a classroom</p>			

	<p>and the teacher turned round and called me a dirty swine. And I said not even my mother calls me that and I got up and walked out and never went back to school. And they were the sort of things, you got it from the pupils (the other kids) as well as the teacher. It wasn't the right thing. I don't know what its like today. But you know my boy went to school had no problems and he's 30 now going in the police force and he's done well for himself, but the prejudice isn't there any more not like it used to be. No. But it was hard as a child. Nobody wanted to know you, you couldn't make friends in the villages because the parents didn't let their kids pay with you, unless it was secret and you'd meet in the fields or the woods somewhere, you know. They used to tell them 'Oh don't you go near the gypsies they'll steal and they'll eat you' and all this stuff, but you know, it was life; we survived.</p> <p>I didn't like sitting in a classroom being told what to do. It was one of the things I had great difficulty in trying to understand what they were talking about when they were talking about people that had been dead for hundreds of years and they were trying to tell you all about them and I couldn't see the sense in trying to learn, so I sort of gave up and if I was sent to school I would play truant. I just didn't have an education but it hasn't done me any harm. My grandmother taught me to read and write. There's not much I can't do handywise you know. I can turn my hand to any job there is and its all self taught and I think why do I need an education? Of course today you've got to have an education. Can't get anywhere today without it, but back in my younger days work was out there and you could get any job you wanted, telling a few little white lies. Tell them you got the experience and you got the job. They weren't that worried back then, not today.</p>
06:11	<p>Its what you are. I don't think it's what you do; it's born in you. I personally don't think you can't just go out and become a traveller. Although people do they buy a caravan and a transit van and they go on the road and they're a traveller, but you can't become a traveller, its born in you its in your blood its there. The wife will tell you I still like to always get out. I don't like to be stuck at home. Even though I don't think I would travel anymore today full time I still love to be out in the open walking in the fields out in the woods. I'm always out and about and traveller is in you. It's not what you can become. Anybody can go on the road and say I'm a traveller, but in the blood; it's got to be in the blood. Yeah.</p>
06:57	<p>What do I want in life? I'll be honest I've got everything I want in life. I don't want for anything. I've worked all my life up to when I had my accident. Saved every penny I could and we're not hard up; we're quite well off. I don't really want for anything. I'm a very happy man.</p>
07:20	<p>In the future it will probably all come to an end because nobody wants a traveller living near them. Nobody wants a site in their village. What are they going to do? They will in the end I think they'll be a race that disappears in with the general people of the world. They will disappear. It will be a shame because they're a culture that should never be lost. They're fading fast. We're all ending up living in houses with gorgers. You never become a gorger, but you accept all of their ways because you have to.</p> <p>In the future, well I'd like more sites provided everywhere for them. I'd like them accepted a bit more by people. If people were to get to know them rather than just condemn them, they would find they're not all bad people because that is the trouble they condemn before they know and shouldn't. There's something different in every book you have to open it up and read it first. But it is if people accept it they've just to know them a bit more instead of condemning them, things'll changed, but I don't think that will ever happen. No. It is a shame. That's life in' it.</p>
08:33	<p>Favourite story? Best time I ever had was when my parents decided to retire from the road and I was about 12. When they decided they were going to retire and I said well I'm not and I said I'm not coming with you and I didn't. I went off with friends of my family and I changed my name and I lived as somebody else for probably 5 years. That doesn't sound much to a lot of people, but when your parents have gone and you know where they are but you won't go and see them because of the way you are and their now living in a house and haven't told anybody what they are because my parents moved into a house in 1961 I think it was 1961/1962, but didn't tell a sole where they'd come from or</p>

	<p>what they were and right to this day my mother has never told a sole what she is. My fathers been dead 17 years and he was the same, wouldn't speak about it. My sister talks about our life, but my brothers don't. I think this is the nicest side of my life because I have kept my origins, my lifestyle, my people. I have kept them alive. I spent 18 years going out talking about my life on the road and it kept me alive and it kept my people alive. It told people the true story of the gypsies. We're not all thieves, rogues and vagabonds. That we do work for a living. That a lot of gypsy men died in the war fighting for this country. My grandfather died in the war, my father fought for this country, but they still didn't get accepted. Its wrong. It is totally wrong. I've come right through and I'm accepted now by everybody and that has been the nicest thing in my life, that everybody accepts me for what I am. If I need something I've got a neighbour over the road that would be here in a flash without thinking 'Oh he's a bloody gypsy I'm not helping him.' They accept you for what you are today. But when you travel the roads still today you are not accepted. Move in a house and 9 out of 10 people will accept you. That is the nicest side of my life is that I've lived it as a youngster, I've come through my teens still living it, I've spent 18 years travelling around talking about it. Now I'm totally retired. A very happy man and I see hundreds of people when I go out and they all speak to me, because I've known them through talking to them and it does make a big difference. It makes a big difference to your life. They all accept the wife as well. I mean she's a gorger gal, she's not of travelling stock, but they all accept her, even though she married a gypsy. Her parents were a bit wary when we first got together; especially her mother. Her dad was all right, but her mother god rest her sole, we lost her 3 years ago, but she was a bit wary of me. Because she said she didn't like men with long hair and gold rings, so I've got both (laughs). So it took me a long, long time to convince her I was here for the good of her daughter to give her what she wanted in life. It was, it was good because we got this house we done it up and I gave her everything and her mother could see what I'd done for her daughter, before she died. So then I was totally accepted, but it did take her a long time to get used to her daughter and she used to say 'running off with a gypsy! Its not right you know. Its not right.' She used to say, but she got round to loving me in the end which was nice. Yeah, she was a lovely lady. We laugh about it how, but as long as you behave yourself and help everybody else, I think no matter where you come from you get on in life and do your best. Yeah.</p>
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