

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
14-03-10		Sarah	Candy	67	30:13
Key timing	Initial of person speaking	Transcription of Interview			
00:00	Candy	<p>Ok, my name is Candy Sheridan. An Irish Traveller from the big Sheridan clan. My parents come over in the late 1950's and my brothers were born on the Westway site in Hammersmith and then after their death we ended up on the sort of the main road on the M4 down to Bristol. So I was born by the roadside probably but then we went on the site, but all I remember when I was young (I only spent the first 10 years of my life in this country) was that all the signs 'No black, no Irish and no travellers' and of course the area that we lived in which was of course Bristol up to London along the M4 really, wherever the work was, was very... We all found it difficult, a sort of very racist period where we weren't wanted and felt we weren't needed and yet it was our fathers that tarmac the M4 and built bridges. We lived in trailers right by the M4 and watched them build bridges and I think people now, their fathers haven't left that landmark have they? So it's very important that the Irish Travellers particularly because we come from a whole generation of tarmacers, bridge builders steel erectors that's been forgotten and I think that shouldn't be.</p>			
01:10		<p>My father ended up having to tarmac when he came to this country. His, my grandparents were horse dealers and antique dealers. The Sheridan Clan is very famous for antique dealers and I've got photographs of my great grandmother at Cork market in 1900 with beautiful stock similar to my stock actually. History repeats itself really, she's selling baskets and churns and pots and brass beds and I sell exactly the same thing so its third or forth generation down. So we come from a long line of that and I kept with it. My father kept with it as far as he could, but during the 1970's with the big recession he ended up having to go back to what the others; his brothers were doing which was tarmac so it's a sort of a combination of things. My father was very keen on sales, he was always selling things and I think that's what's given me that skill. Is his... It's come from him basically. So we've always provide, we were brought up with I was brought up with the vision that I should provide that and we must provide for our children and he did the same for us. I've kept with the antiques I've been doing antiques and market stalls since I was 18, so I've had 30 years of standing or market stalls and fairs buying and selling. I've kept with the bygones and antiques and the furniture and the pictures and the paintings and the churns and pots. I've also tried clothes, I've done a market stall with clothes and ended up getting some orders about 20 years ago when my eldest was young I got some orders from Topshop and Hemes which seems sort of remarkable now and they wanted sort of 200 of this and 400 of that and I was just sitting on a stool, making one of each, because I quite liked.... I was taught my mother to knit and sew and make clothes and we never went to shops, so everything we had was homemade which of course you begrudge as you get older but it was the skill that she gave me that I could look at somebody and cut a pattern, so I did very unusual clothes and I could change things so I got quite a reputation on my market stall for finding things that people liked So I looked at someone and decided what they should wear, I made it to fit them and they came back and they wanted another 5 or they wanted this. So I've done a whole range of things. So I've kept still with the clothes. I've had a couple of shops where I've also done ... I've kept with sort of cushions, things that I can make really, I love colours I like things that I can play with so that's my creative side and I like selling as well. So the selling is the bygones.</p>			
03:42		<p>So my mother taught us to cook, quite plain things, we were taught very much to eat from the hedgerows, we were always eating rabbit, endless little stews. I mean my</p>			

	<p>children complain now, you'll get to know my children and one thing they'll say about me is we'll have a summer stew and a winter stew, but its always stew. My daughter was complaining the other day why can we not have a meal that went on a plate like other people ate, but why do we have to have a stew. The thing is I was taught that way and I've gone on to turn it into a skill so that I now on my stall I do jams, cakes, I make pies, I make puddings and round locally they've asked me to do a recipe book and I can't do a recipe book because there are no recipes. It is what ever is to hand. If someone brought me some apples or pears or anything else I would make something like that. We were taught how to make the fruit wines, all unusual things and of course I make the sloe gins, the raspberry gin, the tayberry gin and I put them in puddings. So if someone asked me for the recipe, I couldn't reproduce it, I couldn't sell it because I can't remember what I put in each pudding. But that's from round here anyway. I've never weighed anything. I don't. I sell scales for a living. It's quite funny and people often say to me do you ever measure anything and I say no I don't. And they got me to do a cookery club in Lily's school and it was cooking from the hedgerow. And after the first week it was the head mistress who said 'You have to use scales because how can these children do it at home? They can't say one handful, one teaspoon and things like that'. So she tried to educate me a bit, but the children were quite happy doing teaspoons, big spoons and things like that. Its an art form it also means that you taste things as you go along and you end up with a proper food not what someone has decided you should follow.</p>
05:18	<p>I was born in a trailer and I have been in and out of trailers and we were on sites certainly until I was 5, 6, 7 we were mainly by the roadside because he didn't like the camps as they were called and there wasn't much freedom on the camps as well. They started being set up in the 60s. So we kept to ourselves and we are a big family. I am one of 8, so we were our own little... we had 3 or 4 trailers, so we sort of our own little unit I suppose really. We started, she wanted... when we came back to this country. We travelled to the age of 10 as well. We travelled around England, but from the age of 10, there was no work. So we went abroad for a few years and we travelled. We were never in houses then, we were always in a camper van or a van or a caravanette and we travelled all over Europe and South Africa. So we spent 4 years travelling and it was when we came back to this country we couldn't find a site. I would have been about 15 in the late 70's and we ended up having to go in a house. He rented a house for us and we stayed in the garden. It was one of those experiences where you just lived in the garden until someone came along and evicted us. And then after that I've lived in: I had the trailer, I've gone in and out of flats, houses, especially in London. I couldn't find anywhere to pull and then we used to pull on the Wanstead flats. Because I was telling somebody recently that, we went down to visit them recently in the East End. But in the end your not wanted. People don't want you to do that, so I've been in houses. It hasn't made me very happy. I've mainly lived in the gardens and I've always kept a trailer so that I can actually travel and do shows and things. I always wanted to show my children where they've come from and to keep, I don't know, my foot in both camps really.</p>
06:54	<p>I love East Anglia I came up here over 20 years ago and came up here with my husband and he umm what we... we were at that point where we had umm we decided whether we'd stay in this country which was getting harder to do and umm be in a trailer, umm or whether we should go back to Ireland. John was from County Clare and he wanted to go home and umm we came to East Anglia and we discovered this area of the Norfolk Broads and realised that it was actually a little bit of Ireland. Very lovely round here. There's lots of good country people who are very, very welcoming. There's lots of auctions. Lots of things you can buy and sell and very welcoming people to anybody as long as you're actually willing to work and wiling to do a deal and you know and give them a bit of time. And umm so in this area in 20 years I've travelled Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire. There the 3 counties I like. I've been over to Essex but it's a very hard place to make a living. There's a lot of harassment still down there, which is what my cousins suffered from. I found Cambridgeshire and Norfolk to be the most friendly umm people are very welcoming and they like to see you working and they're very happy to support you when you do a show. So I love the whole area; I like the landscape and I like</p>

08:04	<p>the people.</p> <p>I think our communities been criminalised because whenever I call to a show in Suffolk or Cambridgeshire, I'm constant... I am stopped and challenged by the police about where I'm going, how long I'm going to be going for, whether I'm coming back. Which shouldn't happen really when your actually going out to a country show to earn a living for your family or you're going out to visit people. Umm certainly got... Its got harder just dealing with the where to pull in, where to go to next. I mean I travel from show to show, so I make sure that from when I have to pull off on the Wednesday, particularly if its July, August and September, I go to the next show. So I'm lucky that I've got a network of people that I travel with and that I know. So I can go from show to show, but most travellers that I know have ended up in houses and do the shows as a bit of therapy, just to remember to remind them who they are and its much more difficult for them with having to go backwards and forwards and their not having to stay on the road that I stay on for weeks and months on end. Yeah, very difficult.</p> <p>We are part of the landscape and country side which is what I tell people round here and there's another generation that's come through that's never seen the wagons on the common land and I think that's been the problem. Where they've driven past, where people my age and people in their 60's and 70's have always seen travellers as part of the landscape and countryside. They've always, umm they haven't liked all of us. Its not always been that romantic but they've known a fair number of us that's been hardworking, kept the country side tidy and gone from farm to farm. And those farmers that I deal with because I do all the bygone auctions, are very, very keen on travellers. They always have a lot of good things to say about us and would have known people, next generation from me and I think what's happened is where we're not allowed to pull on to common land and all the stopping places, basically they've been bounded up and there's nowhere to go. We've become invisible and the only time you see us now in the modern trailers by the roadside means the next generation below me, who have been told that 'We are dirty travellers!' 'Why are they there?' 'Look at the rubbish they're leaving!' 'Why are they living like that?' But without any education and the education needs to come so that they can be told that these people like us have got no where to go. Travellers by the roadside don't want to be by the roadside. There's still 4,000 of us still by the roadside with nowhere to go and I think that... so it's the combination of ignorance and the sort of how visible we are and the last thing would be the press. But where we've never been written up about it's a constant barrage now about travellers all the things we're doing wrong and all the things and how we're costing so much money to councils and how we're sort of... conjures up racial hatred. We had, when we were very young, because of the Irish accents that my family have got (my father and mother have still got) there was certainly a degree of racial hatred in Cambridge and Cambridgeshire area against the Irish travellers that live there, my cousins, but its sort of tempered really when they get to know them. I think that the problem is where we're not mixing because we can't mix umm there is a level of ignorance that is just causing the problems. There's not enough provision, so there's nowhere to live, so there's nowhere to pull in. Umm there's been too many sort of criminal laws been introduced by the police, I can't see anything for the better for my community at all.</p>
11:22	<p>They're amazing children because of the life they've had, because they've been brought up as travellers, but also because they've got their foot in the settled community. So in a way that's the one good thing is that they've crossed bridges that I haven't had to do and they've become more accepted and they're very good at defending their own patch, so that when people say about gypsies and travellers they'll remind them gently that they're actually are one. People forget, people always do that they say you're ok, but it's the others we don't know. But yeah the children have faired better, I mean look at my son. My son has faired much better than my two bothers. My two brothers didn't get to finish school. They were very, very.... Didn't get a great deal of schooling um they've not faired well in life because its difficult to find work without that level of schooling and that level of confidence that was denied them. When I look at my son now who has just started university as it... that is a different world. How could that boy come that path and end up at university. When I tell my cousins, aunts and uncles there's an immense</p>

sense of pride that's come from what his own willingness to do that, much more than my encouragement really, because I was not that encouraging, but its his own strength of character and willingness to do that and the children today are actually fully aware of what they need to do, what life skills they need to have. Which we were in a different world then. We were closeted by our family everything was very protective then. I lived in a very sort of protected world whilst being totally exposed to all the things that people you know a traveller would be exposed to, but we always had our own little unit that was protective and was like a little security blanket around us and umm I haven't been able to do that for my children because of the changing times and having to settle and get them in to school for longer. They've developed their own security blanket, you know, with their own pride.

The biggest change has been being forced to settle and perhaps stay in bricks and mortar which not all of us want to do and that's forcing the biggest change which is the change of you know having to stay still really and having to sort of get on with life like the settled community do which is worry about the bills and the heating and you know keep the children in school and worry about the jobs they're going have. I mean that's the biggest change, its that we're being forced, some people would call it assimilate, you know. We're just being forced to really and I suppose the one strength we have in our community is that we don't wish to totally assimilate. We do wish to keep our trailers whether they're in the front of the house or in the back of the house. We wish to go to those shows that the police are ensuring are constantly stopped or challenged. I suppose that's our one joy really is to meet at a horse fair. Yeah I mean what's happening is that we are being forced to be the same as everybody else. We had much more freedom then, we could go where we wanted there was many fairs to do and it was acceptable. There was so many of us and we were always going from cousin to cousin and it was always acceptable and proud to be traveller. Where there was a turning point when we were growing up when our fathers started saying its best if you don't tell them too much and don't tell them you're a traveller because its just started to turn very... definitely in the late 70's and early 80's and I don't think its recovered since then. I think that's what's been our biggest problem; how do we tell people who we really are and how do we get on with living how we want to live in our communities which could be small family sites causing no trouble or burden to anyone else, but not being able to do that. I miss being with... visiting my family members more because we've all scattered about a lot more and when you do visit them with your trailer, it's just a hassle. Its just a hassle really getting from A to B and if you want to stop on the way and I travel a lot to the fairs as you know with Lily and if we want to pull into a caravan park or just a little holiday place, we're still turned away. We were turned away last year, turned away last month and I think that makes it more difficult for you to travel, so even to just visit. I do, I suppose I just miss being part of a very large clan, because I've ended up being a bit more separated in Norfolk where a lot of my cousins are in Cambridge and Essex, so its nice to keep in contact with them and an awful lot are in the Bristol area, Wolverhampton and um Ireland still. But yeah life is sort of different, but then it's different for everybody isn't it? A different world now. No I mean I'm talking about dealing in bygones and I'm standing at shows and everyone's coming up saying there's 10 of those on eBay, you know you should get yourself on eBay. So my son has got me on eBay and he does all the wheeling and dealing on the computer because that's one of his strengths, but I like to stand with my feet on the grass and actually look at somebody and I like for them to pick up and feel the goods that I'm selling and when you're looking at the computer screen what does it tell you about the pot. You've got no idea of the weight, you don't know if it's genuine, whether it's actually just come in from China. You've got no idea at all, so yeah it's a different world of course it is.

When my mother was on the site in Hammersmith her and my father couldn't go into any shops without being spat on so that would be in the 60's and she was constantly. There was nowhere she could go she felt which was why they came out of London and even in the West Country; Bristol and Bath where I was brought up and Somerset there was a very high level of racism and my father decided that we should go to school and if we had a bit more education then we would try and overcome some of this and umm

16:09

what happened for two of us ... three of us really went to school consistently. All that happened was that we went into the traveller class as part of the ... we went to catholic schools; we went to all the convents and I went to about 22 schools before the age of 10 and I was always in the traveller class with my brother and sister and all the other travellers, quite often Irish travellers as well in the West Country and umm the main problem they had with us was they couldn't understand us. My father is from Rathkeale just outside Limerick. My mothers still got a very strong Cork accent and we had our own little words and language that we had as a family and which we had to do because we were always exposed to different people so we had to know what our mum was going to say or our father wanted us to do next and the Sisters/the nuns didn't like that, so all they ever did with the three of us was have speech therapy. I had it every class I went in, every year of school I went in, I had the traveller class where all they talked about was how you had to sound and umm it was distressing for the family because the first three of us with a very strong English accent and then my father had enough of it and the rest of them have got Irish accents and the last ones have got American accents because they were over there. But you know we're just a funny family now but we're almost like a historical... It's almost like a reference to what's happened. If you look through the last 30 years we all represent what was happening at the time and at the time my father thought it was acceptable for us certainly for us 2 eldest to have an English accent. Given my time again and even when it was happening because I used to be able to slip backward and forward especially going back to Ireland every year, children wouldn't play with you because you were too English and then you got back England and they'd say you sounded too Irish. In the end you became so isolated that you just had to rely on your own family members because nobody else, everybody, you confused everybody else. We all looked very Irish and we certainly attracted attention. Well my mother's got long, long, like my 2 daughters, my mother's got long red flaming hair and my dad's got black hair with blue eyes and my mother's got red hair with green eyes, very striking couple and wherever they went I remember as a child on the buses one would go on my mother would say run for the seats because there were so many of us and people would actually not let us sit next to them on the bus and they would say you dirty Irish shouldn't be on the bus and things like that and they'd spit at my mother and my father. Really gentle people, never did anybody any harm, just getting on the bus and I think I've got many, many memories of really my feeling went to them, I didn't really feel as child it was directed at me because I watched my mother constantly. It made my mother very ill, umm she's even now, she's a very, very gentle person I mean for anyone whose listening who knows about names my mother was a Joyce and Joyces are very quiet, she needed to be quiet because she was married to Sheridan, a very lively one as well. So they were very quiet people. My mothers very reserved, she'd hardly speak in front of people and even now when I visit her in America and she'll be coming over to see me soon, she wont speak in front of people and I look at the scars that its had on her. I've had her in shop and she'll hardly raise her voice and when I say this is my mother, she'll nod you know and even now she has this fear and I say its ok its different now in this country. There are so many different accents and I think the Irish have sort of ... there are so few Irish as well and I think they're quite accepted in East Anglia as well, so people are a bit warmer. But she's still got this fear that when she opens her mouth well of course I haven't got that fear and I was brought up with don't be fearful, just ask for whatever you need and speak your mind which is what my father said, but that's what he wanted to instil in his children. Yes a lot of this developed directed at the voices and looks and of course my cousins at Dale Farm in Basildon they have a lot of racism directed at them when they go shopping or when they want to go into the hair dressers or the dentist or the doctors and when they hear the accent people still feel oh it's the Irish why are they here. Yet if you ask any of us we've got British passports. All my cousins were born in this country. All of them have got British passports and yet they've retained their Irish accent because of living on a site with all fellow Irish Travellers, you know, mixing just with themselves.

20:47

When we first came to Norfolk everything was fine when we were in the countryside and we were trying to make a living and we were selling. When we bought this building,

this shop which was 9 years ago, when we bought it and came to this town; this small town and we started to strip the front of the building and do things up people came and wanted to know who we were and the first question they asked me was are you a traveller and I said Yeah I am, I am a traveller and we are going to settle and buy this building and this is my husband and my husband always kept to the background because he had a quite strong Irish accent. We had a bit of trouble when we first came, people were very racist and they were very spiteful to my children because it was a building site that we were doing up I mean you've seen the photo's it was a derelict building. So we bought into a town that was on its knees anyway and we hadn't ever wanted a shop, but we thought it was about time to actually settle in a market town in the Norfolk area. When I sent them to school especially my eldest Ella with her long red hair. The first thing that happened was she was called a dirty gypsy and you know you live on a dirty building site and of course my husband was fantastic and he said go back to school and don't worry about them just keep going don't worry girls are really spiteful and of course they got more and more spiteful so she had to come out of school and he kept saying to her 'Ella I will turn this building into the best building in this town and everybody will be looking and thinking those people are actually alright' and they are actually ... he was so creative and so wonderful being a carpenter and I think he did the building for myself and my girls really to show us and show the town that he could do so much. But yeah the racism was, we had a lot of graffiti on the walls on the front and my back gate. I've had dirty gypsy written on the back gate several times actually I don't know suddenly someone's remembered who I am or where I come from and the graffiti was always through the window about how dirty we were. Always the word dirty which we had as a child as well as being dirty on the bus when we weren't. When we were all dressed up to go to church, we were immaculate in white and lace and people called us dirty. Ironically living on a building site we weren't dirty. The building was dirty, but we weren't dirty. But Ella suffered at school and my son he sought of managed it better really. He turned it into a joke, but you can't do that when you're a young girl. Lily's faired much better because we'd been in the town longer and although everybody knows who she is, she has faired better because we have become accepted and what they saw was that we turned a derelict building into a beautiful building. We worked very hard for a living and we made everybody welcome and never turned anyone away and I think in the end the only way to win hearts and soles especially in any town is to be yourselves and what we always said to people was to be kind to everybody. You know if they came in being aggressive you know just to ask them to mind their manners. There was that sign I showed you as well you know be polite to us because you're in our home but we are happy you are in our home you know and when we locked up in the evening the amount of times my husband would say I wonder if they would invite us into their home? And regrettably the answer would probably be no. We're a real community shop really because what was nice about the shop was that um travellers came in to sell you things you know the churns and the pots and bring you things horse stuff as well. Lots of saddles and things like that. The older travellers round here there's a lot of house travellers around here they couldn't travel anymore to Appleby and they'd come and bring you the stuff so that you could take it and sell it for them which was lovely. And all sorts came in here really and still now people come and visit still which is lovely. So it was like a bridge where everybody felt they could be their own. I mean most of that skill was down to my husband because he was a very quiet man and he just quietly won people round and he was always singing which sounds strange in a shop, I know, but he had a great voice and he could play the guitar and the banjo and spoons and there wasn't a day gone past when he wasn't actually singing a tune and he'd ask for his banjo or his guitar. It was probably bizarre for people, mainly people who come in as visitors off the boats, Norfolk Broads and a lot of Irish would come over and say it's a little bit of County Clare and I'd say that's where he's from, he's from County Clare. This is what we've always done. It seemed right to do it in our shop in our home and people liked the unusualness of it and it was also the welcoming them into our kitchen and feeding them with me making jams and cakes and things. I'm sure most ... some in the town continue to think it's quite eccentric and its not quite right and its not a proper shop. (laughs)

25:07	<p>I went to lots of schools until I was 10, we then travelled where I didn't go to school at all. I came back to this country when I was 15 and my job was to take my younger brothers and sisters to school, so I then went to school when I dropped them off. I was getting later and later and the school intervened and said I had to go to school more and my father's solution was that he would take me out. So I came out, you know that's what schools did in those days. They complained and you took your child out. It still happens now. So I came out then to help my mother. And then my father went back to Ireland to look for work from 15 to 16 and I did all my work very quickly and I was quite keen to get into school and my mother said I could go as long as I came out early to fetch the others. So I just appeared in the school at strange times. It was in the Reading area and the Newbury area and we went back down to Swindon as well and Slough and I just appeared in these schools and I don't know what they ever thought of me. The teachers were ok then. I think it's different now where it's more, people have got children it's like my little girl you have to take this and give them special notice to come out for a show. In those days you could just appear and disappear and nobody was too bothered. There was something called traveller... Traveller Education had just started. The truancy officer was on our case a lot. Traveller Education had just started up. They weren't helpful they just wanted to know why you weren't in there. It was difficult to help my mum and be in school, so I did ... I had that schooling and that was enough because I could easily read and write and the best thing about life really is that .. making a living and to be able to make a living you need to have a level of confidence and I was put on a stall very early and I always worked with our father as well. All the things he did we worked with him as a family, so all of us had a lot of social skills and confidence and that's ... a little bit of reading and writing obviously and then the social skills where you could stand on the stall and do things. I didn't enjoy going to school. My early schooling was always being put in the traveller class and we weren't allowed ... because you were in the traveller class when you came to the playground we couldn't mix easily because the other children knew we were travellers and they would spend a lot of time being really horrible to us. Because we were set up, we were pitted against them really as the ones that were in the special class, like we were special needs or something. We were always kept aside. I didn't like school there was a lot of bullying, some of the sisters of mercy were cruel at times to us because of who we are and umm just not fitting in and they didn't like my father who would come up every now and again and ask to take us out of school again. They were cruel. He didn't want anyone to be cruel to us, he just wanted us to be taught to read and write. So the only time I enjoyed school was when I came back in the period from 15 to 16 and I wasn't there formally I was just there, I enjoyed being there. But no I didn't enjoy it, I found it quite hard to support my children to be in school. I told my cousins to get their children in to school and they've all gone to primary school, but they haven't gone to secondary school and I've encouraged them to do that to get the extra skills and things especially for the boys to be able to read and write well enough and I know that's the most difficult thing really. But I mean I'm lucky my children have managed, the two of them have been through high school, my two eldest and Lily will go on to that, and I said she enjoys school.</p>
28:28	<p>I think what will happen in 20, 30 years is that any sites that are passed already they will stay as family sites and they will be passed from family to family and I think that everybody else will be forced into houses and will become what they want is for us to become like country settled people. I think that's where it's going. Every successive government has ensured that we don't retain our identity, our way of life and our cultural and we have a strong cultural bias to be on a family site and to be in trailers and that's not been encouraged by any government at all. No government has made it easier to do that and I think what will happen in 30 years is that most travellers will be in houses. I mean there's a bit of a back lash in Norfolk because it's the house traveller that want their children to come out and they want to come out because they've been to one or two shows and think this is really neat I'm beginning to discover who I really am and they want to come out. But the hardest thing is to identify a site and to get it passed and I think that's what stands in our way really. They have that control over us, Local and Central Government. One hand says to provide the sites. Locally they say no we don't</p>

		<p>want them. I'd love to see all the house travellers, I'd love to see them out because I deal with them in a different way. I deal with them through my role as a Councillor and I know how unhappy and unhealthy they are and what they really want is to be able to come back out and they want to show their grandchildren where they really come from and who they are. So I'd like to see them be able to come out on sites. I think every time they build a housing estate, <u>every time</u>, there should be a small traveller site attached, so that everybody gets used to the fact that some of us want to live in caravans and some people want to live in houses and if that was more accepted then there wouldn't be this thing we build, racism.</p>
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