

Celebrating Diversity: Teaching Tolerance

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(Left) Joan and members of her wedding party dressed for her extravagant dream wedding at St Thomas of Canterbury, Salford.

TRADITIONS

- Speak language of their ancestors
- Live in separate communities
- Arrange marriages among the group
- Married women are homemakers
- Men travel the country for work
- Strong sense of pride and tradition

RELIGION

Travelers are Roman Catholic and hold similar beliefs as mainstream Catholics. They are baptized as infants, receive first communion around age 8, and confirmed between 15 and 18 years of age.

Women attend mass, receive communion and go to confession throughout life, while men only attend for holidays and special events. Funerals are now held within 6 months to ensure extended families can attend.

Irish Travelers

History

Irish Travelers also, referred to as White Gypsies or Irish Gypsies, originate from a group of pre-Celtic minstrels and displaced farmers during the mid-1600's. According to their oral tradition, Travelers are the oldest inhabitants of the island. Romani Gypsies, although they had a similar lifestyle, are actually of Asian Indian origin and came to Europe in the early Middle Ages.

Travelers once roamed from town to town in horse-drawn carts, often earning their keep as tinsmiths. During the Renaissance, some Travelers and Gypsies did extraordinarily well financially. They were accustomed to change and working with limited resources so many were able to thrive in this environment.

During the potato famine of the mid-19th century, a group of Irish Travelers immigrated to America. At first they settled in Washington, D.C. and prospered as horse traders. For a more leisurely lifestyle and better weather, the clan moved to the south. In 1880, there were many Travelers near Atlanta and other areas of Georgia doing what they had done for hundreds of years in their motherland, travelling the roads, trading horses, doing odd jobs, painting houses and selling floor covering.

For many years April 28 was the most important date for these Travelers. On that date they would gather at the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in downtown Atlanta for

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Modern Day Traveler Life

their annual funeral service. Since they continued a set pilgrimage throughout the year, the remains of dead members were sent to an Atlanta funeral home and kept until that April date. Then the clan would gather and all the caskets would be brought to "The Immaculate" for the funeral mass. Often there were five or six people who would be buried afterwards at Oakland cemetery. The graves are still today.

Today's Population

Today Travelers continue to live in Ireland and the UK but there is little communication with travelers who live in the US. Although not counted as a separate ethnic group by the US census, there are an estimated 800 families in Georgia, 350 families in South Carolina, 300 families in Mississippi and close to 50 families in Texas.

The 7,000-10,000 descendants in America still speak the secret Traveler language known as Shelta. The language includes elements of Irish, Gaelic, English, and has two dialects known as Gammon and Cant. Some common surnames for Travelers are Carpenter, Carroll, Gorman, Lewis, Joyce, McNally, Hartnett, O'Hara, Riley Sherlock and Sheedy. Many use nicknames to make it easier to differentiate among several people with the same name.

The largest camp in the US is the 350 families in Murphy Village near North Augusta, SC. In 1966 catholic priest Father Joseph Murphy founded Murphy's Village to provide a more permanent residence for the Travelers of modern times. St. Edward Parish was founded there in 1964 as a place of worship for the camp. Nearby residents are often confused and yet intrigued by the covered windows, which some believe are designed to keep evil spirits out until the family moves in. It is also common to see religious statues on the lawns of the large

homes. The level of secrecy adds to the curiosity and suspicions of most outsiders.

Work

Many Americans have an image of Travelers being beggars and thieves who migrate in rag tag bands. Police in some areas warn the elderly about home improvement scams. Others insist that the Travelers commit no more crime than other communities. In South Carolina, many work as itinerant roofers, pavers, and painters. Traveler men generally travel half the year doing labor work and then return to their homes in winter.

Marriage/Family

Travelers have a tight-knit community that arranges marriages within the group. In more recent times, couples have been allowed some influence over their chosen mate. Sex before marriage is unacceptable, and girls/women are expected to live at home (with little or no time away from her parents) until married. The average girl marries between age 15 and 18, while men are typically 21 or older. A dowry is expected, but the average amount is not disclosed. Rumors indicate that dowries have gone as high as \$200,000 among wealthy Travelers. Although disputed, sources state that Travelers are allowed to marry second cousins. Rarely, women of less affluent families (in some villages) marry outsiders or even do factory work.

Many Traveler families start out living in mobile homes and later build brick houses. In large camps, it is not unusual to see rows of trailers suddenly interrupted by an ornate brick mansion. Travelers do not value formal education, so most children only receive primary education. They stay at home with their mothers while the men travel for work. Children often start to learn their roles (vocation or housewife) starting at age five.

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(Above) 'Kathleen', who was a victim of domestic abuse, with one of her children and the crockery passed down from her mother. Kathleen lives with her six children in a three-bedroom trailer. She lives a fairly typical of lifestyle for a Traveler woman, except that she is separated from her husband.

RECENT EXPOSURE

My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding, the television series that attracted millions of viewers in the UK and US, was designed to "throw an overdue light on a secretive, marginalized and little-understood segment of our society", according to a British broadcaster. However, the show received much criticism for omitting problems of the average Irish or Romany Gypsy, such as discrimination, poor health and poverty.

CONTROVERSY

Travelers are often criticized by outsiders or "country men", for not educating their children. It is also documented that their daughters may be married as early as age 12. During a ceremony called looping, girls dress in elaborate sequined dresses, wear heavy make-up and dance provocatively for the men. Many are repulsed by this practice, seen as objectifying very young girls. Some sources claim that Irish Traveler women endure domestic violence at a higher rate.



Fundamental Christian Beliefs

1. God is the creator of the universe, sovereign ruler of all that is, the sole judge of all that is true and false, right and wrong, good and bad. No one created Him; He has always been there and will continue eternally unchanged. God is holy, loving, just, merciful, and good. God is eternal, unchanging, omnipresent, all-knowing and all-powerful.

2. God has planned ahead of time everything that will happen; He has created the universe and humanity with His purpose in mind, and He oversees the entire creation with absolute power.

3. God is a triune God or one God in three distinct persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. “They” are always together, always cooperating and have always existed. The Father initiates, the Son complies, and the Holy Spirit executes the will of both.

4. Jesus is the Son of God. He is the second member of the Trinity and He participated in the creation. He became a human, Jesus of Nazareth, having been born to a virgin, coming to earth to do the will of God the

Father. He lived a sinless life, yet He was faced with the same temptations man experiences. Therefore, He understood man’s struggles. He gave his life for man’s sins and was resurrected on the third day. He ascended into heaven and will come again someday to judge sin and gather His people to spend eternity with Him.

5. The only way to become a child of God is through faith in Jesus Christ. Every person who asks for deliverance from their sin and trusts Jesus Christ, the Lord alone for forgiveness will be justified. This will make one right with God and also a *child* of God.

6. The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, regenerates our hearts, and transforms our will and renews our mind so that we might live by the Spirit, through the Son, to the glory of the Father.

7. The 66 books of the Bible comprise the error-free Word of God and Christians read it, love its truth, come to know God more deeply by it, and live by its counsel.

8. Baptism is an outward expression of one’s acceptance of Jesus Christ as their Savior.

CHRISTIANITY

Christianity is the largest religion in the world with approximately 2 billion people or 33% of the world’s population who identify as Christian. There are thousands of different denominations worldwide, including Baptist, Presbyterian, and Catholic. The various denominations hold most of the same core beliefs; however they have different leadership and styles of worship.

Religious Identification of Americans (in millions)

Christian	173
Jewish	2.7
Muslim	1.3
Budhist	1.2
Atheist	1.6
Agnostic	2.0
No Religion	30

<http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2011/tables/11s0075.pdf>

Staff Spotlight: Rick Acton



Date of birth: “Younger than Methuselah, but older than Justin Beiber.”

Place of birth: Columbus, Ohio.

Family of Origin: Rick was born and raised in Columbus, Ohio. He has 1 sister who is 4 years older. His mother currently resides in assisted living in Columbus and his father passed away in 1999. Rick has one daughter and one granddaughter.

In my household: Rick lives with his wife and very best friend, Maggi Cherek and their 14 y/o Golden Retriever, Chloe.

Hobbies: Golfing, traveling, reading. He does not read “murder, mayhem, gore and awful....but that does not exclude Pat Conroy.”

Talents: “I think I listen well and I love to see people grow. It’s really satisfying to watch people grow personally and professionally.”

Core values/beliefs:

* “Leadership sets the conditions for success of an organization. “ I don’t do details well. I can see all of the seemingly unrelated threads and colors that make a tapestry and know what it should look like, but I can’t weave it to save my life. That is why it is important for me to have others around me who are compulsively attentive to details.”

* “Define what right looks like. Leadership sets the direction of the organization and sometimes this requires teaching or even some marketing for others to buy into the direction; especially if it is new or different. If people have a clear sense of where an organization is going, people have the choice of either buying into it or leaving. You can’t do both effectively. So you either buy into the system, structure, and reality or you leave”.

* “Tell the truth even if it hurts sometimes. I usually don’t sugar-coat things or sweet-talk. It is important to do the right thing. In the context of doing the right thing, hopefully you will move lives forward, yours and others, leaving it a better place than when you got there.”

Most important life experience:

“I would like to say it is some dramatic, huge thing, but it is really very simple: It was a Sunday afternoon almost 29 years ago, standing in the living room with Maggi and the minister from our church. We were getting married and had to do it at our home because Maggi’s father was terminally ill with cancer and the only way he could see her get married was to sit in the recliner. He was secure that the lives of those he loved (his wife, daughter, and granddaughter) would be secure and all would be right. He died the next year.”

Most influential person/people in my life:

The most influential person in his life is Maggi, his wife. She has 30+ years of experience as a psychiatric social worker and is “perfectly grounded, based and rooted in reality”. “I was surrounded by Gods and Goddesses in terms of mental health early in my career. They were truly clinical and intellectual geniuses as psychiatrists and clinical social workers. But they were also caring compassionate individuals. They were my mentors and role-models and they all left indelible marks and impressions on me both personally and professionally.

Goal/Mission in life: “At the end of the day to be able to say I did the best I could with the skills I had and achieved a greater outcome than I expected”.

Recommended Reading/Viewing

The Help by Kathryn Stockett 2009, Directed by Tate Taylor (2011)

The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini 2003, Directed by Marc Forster (2007)

Liberating Paris by Linda Bloodworth Thomason (2005)

The Tuskegee Airmen, Director: Robert Markowitz (1995)

Gran Torino, Directed by Clint Eastwood (2008)

Windtalkers, Directed by John Woo (2002)



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The Georgia Bulletin

Time Magazine

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