



Grit and beauty: the lives of Irish Traveller children - in pictures

Jamie Johnson spent five years photographing the fun-loving, fashion conscious kids who are forced to spend their childhoods battling prejudice

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Jamie Johnson has spent more than 20 years photographing children. In 2014 she was invited to Ireland to document the Irish Travellers, a nomadic, ethnic minority who have lived on the margins of society for centuries. While the Travellers don't usually welcome outsiders, Johnson's kindness and respect won them over and she was granted access to photograph their lives and culture. *Growing up Travelling: The Inside World of Irish Traveller Children* by Jamie Johnson is published by Kehrer.



In the book's foreword, Mary M Burke writes: 'Among the special characteristics of the Traveller children is their passion for fashion. The boys are depicted looking sharp and tough while the girls are shown adorned in designer dresses.'



The images capture the children's grit and beauty, resilience and optimism, and reveal their pride for their family and culture.



Burke writes: 'Travellers share common descent and history and possess discrete cultural practices: boundary rules against outsiders and strict gender roles.'



Each trip to Ireland deepened Johnson's bonds with the community.



In Johnson's images, Traveller children present themselves in terms of what is important to their aesthetic and cultural values.



Johnson immediately fell in love with the outgoing, fun-loving Traveller children, who were eager to pose for her camera. They would become the focus of a five-year photo project documenting the community.



In this close-knit community that faces constant prejudice and racism, loyalty to family is paramount.



She formed a special relationship with the children she invited to follow her around and take turns using her cameras.



The images allow us to witness the joy and pride that Traveller children feel in their own culture, suggested by the way they openly mimic their elders.



Although these are not privileged children, the intimate and compelling images make us question received notions of privilege.



The photographs were taken in Galway, Limerick, Cork and Tipperary.



In her artist statement, Jamie Johnson writes: 'It is with an honest heart I hope to show these beautiful children. They have great hopes and goals and work every day to reach their dreams no matter how hard they have to fight racism and stereotypes placed on them for centuries. A child is an innocent, happy, precious part of the world that should be loved and accepted and encouraged no matter where or how they live.'



The Traveller children are raised as devout Catholics.