

What makes a home?

We asked Gypsy, Roma, Traveller and nomadic people across the UK to tell us what they think of, when they think of home. We heard that home means family, acceptance, food, historic places, heirlooms, community and much more.

Davie

My name is Davie, I'm a Scottish Traveller. I've lived in houses my whole life and I live in a house now, but seasonally my family have always went on the road and 'moving' into a trailer each year. Sometimes a home can be a piece of land, a layby or a side of the road where that your family has called home for thousands of years. Our house is where we keep our things, but on the road, it feels more natural.

For me, it was more about the place where the trailer was parked, rather than the trailer itself. When we camped in cities, we stopped on industrial estates and the like - because there was nowhere else to go. My dad and cousins would work, and we would move on after a couple of weeks.

I didn't get that feeling of being at home, you felt scared; unsure if people in cars were planning to report us or start a fight. But on camps, being told stories of people who had lived there for hundreds of years, people you haven't met, but you'd met through stories. That's when I

felt truly at home, when you're in those places. When you boil it down, people feel at home when they're in places that have belonging and meaning to them, and when they're surrounded by their own people.



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For me, cooking on the fire feels like home. Getting bought or inheriting your first cast iron pan is a right of passage. Cooking on the fire is a link to life on the road. It gives a sense of peace and safety.

My grandad and granny would have lived in similar ways to me, but they would have lived in a bow-tent. My granny's people owned wagons periodically, but mostly would have lived in a tent.

Most Travellers then would have lived on the road. Home for my grandparents would have been anywhere they were surrounded by their family. Although, in her day, there still will have been ancestral camps that will have been used for a long time. We have camps here, that some say were stopping places during the Roman times. I can only assume she would have the same feeling that I did, camping in places like that.

There's a big sense of pride when you're shifting with family and loved ones on the road. You're free to be you.



Mania



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I am a Roma woman, I am 49 years old. I am Eastern European/Balkan Roma. I don't feel like I've found my home in a particular country yet, feeling home for me would mean acceptance - the place where I feel like I can be myself. I was born in Croatia, in a tent.

My mother and father ran away together, because they were from different Roma communities. My family, and I as a baby, were living in a tent at that time, but enforcement authorities were coming and breaking the tent everyday, telling us to leave. We had to run away from the country, without any documents. We arrived in Italy at a camp with lots of Roma people from many of the Balkan states and across the world; Roma people from many subgroups and speaking different languages. We lived in tents with our family, eating food cooked on the fire.

We couldn't go to school because we didn't have paperwork. From there, with other families, we moved to Sweden, Holland, France, Germany, Belgium and more. We would have to move when the authorities forced us away from the country, or when country people (gorja) were violent towards us.

I feel at home when I'm eating barbecue with my family. The smell, the way it carries through the home; it brings back good memories of being together.

My grandfather on my father's side was an amazing man. He married just before the Second World War and his wife had a baby. They were captured by the Black Legion and put in concentration camps with his mother, father, brothers and sister.

All the family were killed apart from my grandfather and his brother. They were experimented on by Nazi soldiers. Home for our family has been difficult, as we have been chased away from so many places. Roma people are so often not accepted.



Chris

Wherever my family is, that's my home.



I'm an Irish Traveller, born just outside Manchester in England. I'm married with 3 wonderful children and a beautiful wife. I live in bricks and mortar at the moment, but plan on bringing my family travelling again.

I was born in the 80s on a Traveller campsite. I was one of nine children. There were a lot of different families on the camp. They were tough days, but that was my childhood and I'm proud of them. We were travelling for a few years, from place to place, until my mother fell ill, and we had to move into a house because it was better for her health.

When we moved into the house, our neighbours didn't like us, there were petitions, calls to the council and all sorts, but we stayed where we were. I miss the trailers, sites, camps - it's in our blood, it's who we are. There's a sense of belonging when we're roadside with our family, these people mean something to you. It's the community, the closeness - the sense of being part of something bigger than yourself. We class our friends as family because they're as close as.

We'd travel for weddings, events, to see someone who was ill or to pay our respects. To me, home is where my family is. Wherever my family is, that's my home. I grew up with my cousins and my family and when we were younger, we would be camped together - the relationships we had were more than friendships, it's brotherly; as an adult, we live in different places, but there's a longing to see each other and speak about the old times.

Sometimes there would have been four or five generations of family on a camp. My grandmother would have lived in bow tents. I have beautiful memories of her, she came to visit us as often as she could. If I was asked what home for her was, it would have been her children - having her children round her. She also loved all of her grandchildren and enjoyed spending time with us. My uncle still makes the old tents - he teaches young Traveller children to make these tents in back in Ireland, so they can understand the ways we used to live.



Abiline

I'm Romany Gypsy. The first place I remember living was on yard in a small tourer, it had a log burner for wood or coal. There was a stream down the side. I remember being scared by thunder and lightning on the yard, one day when I was out without my brother. We were inseparable.

After that, we moved in to a big Showman's trailer which was red and silver on the outside, there was a living space and two bedrooms in it. We lived next to Cordona's funfair.

In the Summertime, I would look after my younger brother, who had a heart condition, helping wash, clean and cook. My older brother would work at the Fair. From when I was about 12, I would work at the bingo.

We would go to the cafes and the shops - everyone got on really well.

It wasn't like now. The Cordona's owned a disco place - one day Leo Sayer sang to me. I didn't have the common savvy then to know it was a big thing. We stayed on a residential outside Aberdeen for a while and then we had to move into a house for my brother's medical issues.

History repeats itself, because I'm doing the same with my daughter now - living in a house to receive medical support. My brother and I were traumatised by the house. What made me feel like home, was not just being in the trailer, say the hobby, with the rain on the roof - but having my people around me. I wasn't scared. When I feel isolated from my people, it gives me anxiety.

That's why we need more sites. Everyone needs to feel, where they are, we belong. I feel safe, in my trailer, on a site. The things that remind me of home are Crown Derby and Welsh blankets. They're passed down through our generations. One of my ancestors, Yankee Joe Verra, he bought the trotting horses here to the UK, from America.

You see Verra's to this day leading horses at Appleby Fair.



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Showman

Tyler

My name is Tyler, I live in South London but am originally from West Oxfordshire. I'm a Showman, up until I was 7 I lived in a huge trailer which we would take to different fun fairs around the country. We'd leave around March and be out until about October.

In the Winter we didn't have a permanent base for ages so we used to spend different Winters in different places, but always in the same trailer. Because Showmen have lorries, we can pull bigger units. The wagons we had were massive, about 40 foot long, and had central heating - it was a decent space. I used to really enjoy it.

Now I live in a flat in Lewisham. Because I didn't have a house I grew up in, and the trailer we had when we were younger probably doesn't exist anymore, there's not a place I can go specifically that feels like home.

But when I think of home, it's more like spaces - that park feels like home because I felt comfortable there. As a Showman, we get to go there year after year, we see cities and places change. There's something about a big fair that you know will be really busy - everyone will be there, people you haven't seen for ages.

With everyone getting ready to set up, and then doing the thing that you're best at - that can feel like home. It's common for Travellers of any description to keep things that remind them of home - I have lots of pictures and books about funfairs in my home. My great aunt Annie Hatwell was one of those people who was incredibly old my entire life. She had a tiny trailer where she made candy floss and toffee apples to sell on a kiosk at the fair. I woke up one morning, really early when no one else was up. She was showing me how to make toffee apples and talking to me.

She would rarely use electric, because she grew up in a time when it wasn't used. She made me a cup of tea in this tiny space. She moved into a house when she was older, to a house with loads of blankets - she was always making cakes. That house has been knocked down now, and where they've built new houses, it's called Hatwell Row.

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Savannah

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I grew up in a flat in Swindon and currently live on the Kennet and Avon canal. My family lived in a flat until I was 10, which is when we moved onto a boat. We lived in a 60ft boat for about a year and a half and then a tiny little wooden boat, all 5 of us. We lived on there for a couple of years - I actually moved out when I was 15 and had a little boat that was towed behind, to give me a bit of privacy.

My mum's grandmother was Romany Gypsy, we had buses and trucks and all sorts when we were kids. We had done a lot of camping and exploring when we were younger. My dad now lives in a truck on the road, my mum lived in a caravan and then a house.

I've stayed on the water, because I really do feel that this is my home. When you pull up somewhere new, it feels so refreshing. Your plans can change in a moment when you see someone you know, you all pull on to the side together, that's it - the kids are playing, the dogs are put out, someone's got a fire pit, someone's wrapping potatoes. It's that moment of joy, seeing someone you've not seen someone you know for a long time.

I remember feeling at home for the first time, with my big shoes, next to my daughters. We've spent the last couple of years planting daffodils everywhere we stop - when we're passing places now, my daughter wonders if the daffodils we see in the hedges are ones that we planted.

