



NEW RELEASE

## Jamie Johnson *Growing Up Travelling* The Inside World of Irish Traveller Children

Text by Mary M. Burke  
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### Between freedom and ostracism: The world of the Irish Traveller Children

American photographer Jamie Johnson has been traveling around the world for twenty years and is best known for her touching portraits of children. When she came to Ireland for the first time in 2014, she immediately felt connected to the cosmos of the Irish Travellers and would visit and photograph them time and again for five years. Fascinated by the resilience and optimism of the children, who are proud of the culture and traditions of the Irish Travellers, Johnson's portraits aim to promote the perception and respect of children as such, far removed from the common prejudices of society. The photographs have been taken in Galway, Limerick, Cork and Tipperary, Ireland.

*»Travellers are members of a historically nomadic and non-literate ethnic minority that has existed on Ireland's margins for centuries. As a result of decades of pressure from the Irish authorities, Travellers today tend to live in houses in Irish towns and cities, though some still 'halt' (settle seasonally, either legally or illegally) in caravans or other mobile structures for some or most of the year in both serviced and unserved sites on the urban periphery. Nevertheless, and because of the distinct cultural practices the tradition of travelling accreted over many generations, the term 'Traveller' is applicable even when the nomadic way of life has effectively been abandoned. The 2016 Census for the Republic of Ireland documents a population of 30,987 Irish Travellers, representing 0.7 per cent of the general population. For many generations, Travellers provided seasonal farm labour, horse-trading, hawking, entertainment and smithing services to both urban and rural populations. These functions held a good degree of value in an earlier Ireland in which rural communities were isolated and in which the uses that might be made of urban space were less restricted.*

*Contemporary Travellers share common descent and history and possess discrete cultural practices: boundary rules against outsiders, strict gender roles, an aspiration to be mobile, an adaptive tradition of self-employment and involvement in marginal trades, a preference for flexibility of occupation over job security, a pattern of providing short-term labour in accordance with market demands, adherence to Catholicism involving public displays of religiosity, early school-leaving, early marriage and substantial dowry payments when the families are affluent, unique material and oral cultures, a tradition of meeting with other Travellers at certain major annual festivals, and distinct rituals of death and cleansing«.*

– from the text by Mary M. Burke

*»Jamie has a legacy of photographing children and families, close to home or in places remote and unfamiliar. Her innate ability to understand and appreciate the human condition, allows her to engage with her subjects in an authentic way. Jamie's years-long investigation of Irish Travellers reveals her deep connection to and interest in the lives of children«.*

– Aline Smithson

*»The first word that comes to mind when I think of Jamie Johnson's work is kindness. Because how can you enter a community without first having forged close ties and established a relationship based on mutual respect with the members who make it up?...Fully sharing the daily life of her subjects, she captures the essence and photographically reproduces this shared intimacy which can be seen in the confident eyes of her models«.*

– Alain Laboile

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