

A Gypsy's Wish

Reviewed by Joanne Steele, a young Traveller living in Ipswich. She combines site life with a successful educational experience. Joanne is in Year 9 at Westbourne High School and is currently considering options for her future.

'A Gypsy's Wish' is the latest film by director Daniel Allum who is based in Suffolk. It was shown in the UGC cinema, Ipswich to a varied audience on January 23, 2004.

'A Gypsy's Wish' is about a girl called Kelly Loveridge whose ambition is to become a singer. Kelly is a Romany Traveller who goes to a school where a gang of teenagers are bullying her because of who she is. But at the end, after all the trouble, she finally gets to sing with a band in a pub and her dream comes true.

Before I went to see the film I did not know what to expect but afterwards I felt very proud to be a Traveller. Because Kelly proved to racists, and more importantly to herself, that she could achieve her ambition to become a singer.

Kelly had to face racist abuse at school but I myself have been very fortunate and this has not been a problem for me.

After the film I asked the director Danny Allum some questions. These are his responses.

How long did it take you to make 'A Gypsy's Wish?'

The rehearsal, shooting and editing took about three months in total. There were three parts to the whole project. First we did what was called a 'scoping' exercise which meant we went to local sites and asked Travellers if they wanted a video made and if they did, what would be the issues they'd like it to be about. They said yes, they would like to make a video so we recruited some Travellers to help write and star in the film. Finally we set up ten conferences so that two of the Travellers who helped make the film could attend the conferences and when the film was shown could answer questions about issues raised by the film. So, as I said, the film took about three months to make but the whole project has taken about a year. By the way a copy of the video is being given to each Traveller family in Suffolk for free. The project was funded jointly by Suffolk County Council, Prosper and the Childrens' Fund.

Was it hard work to become a director?

When I was 25 years old I went to drama school in London and studied acting for three years. This gave me the confidence to direct and write plays for the stage and to produce films and videos. Although I was trained as an actor, by the end of the course I decided I wanted to direct. You see, when you're an actor the director is telling you what to do all the time. There's nothing wrong with that because at the beginning it's the only way to learn. But as I went through I liked the idea of taking control of the whole production and that's what a director does. The most important thing a director needs is vision. He or she needs to be able to read the script, whether it's a play or a film, and decide how they want the whole film to turn out. The second thing that a director needs is good communication skills. It's no good having the vision if you can't get people to make it happen for you!

How old were you when you knew you wanted to do drama?

I was old! About 25! Before that I'd been travelling around the country in a caravan all my life. I had no education so couldn't read or write. But when I was 16 I decided to teach myself to read and write. You see, when I was a child what I really wanted to be was a rock star! I must tell you when I was young I was useless at the kind of work we used to do, which was either field work or calling for scrap iron. My father thought I was the laziest person he knew because when I was supposed to be working hard I was daydreaming of being on stage singing my new number one song!

But I think I just had a very creative mind and sometimes in the Traveller community a creative mind isn't given much room to be free. This is the main reason I've set up the Romany Theatre Company. So that Travellers who want to get involved in acting, directing, writing, dancing, singing ... in fact anything to do with the arts can have a bit more chance to explore.

Kelly Loverridge who was the lead role in the play, did she cry when making 'A Gypsy's Wish'?

Kelly found one scene in particular very difficult in the film. It was the scene in the playground where she is being picked on by a gang of bullies. I told her it was only acting and the 'gang of racists' were not racists at all, only actors. (They were in fact very nice people.) But because she had faced this sort of thing in school for real it was too close to the truth, she got upset and wasn't able to complete the scene. It was a shame because it's the scene where her friend Tom (a non-Traveller) confronts the bullies. This was supposed to have been Kelly's scene. This was supposed to have been Kelly's chance to stand up to them. But I could understand how she felt and she did have the chance to get her own back on them at the end when she sings. So it all turned out OK in the end.

What advice would you give me to become more successful when I am older?

I'm helping run a speaker programme for Shell at the moment. Yes, me, who had no education, training senior management at one of the world's biggest companies! It just shows you anything's possible if you put your mind to it. No matter who you are my advice is the same and it's the way I did it.

There are five main steps to making a success of your life. Use them if you want.

1DECIDE what you want to do. And make sure it's what YOU want to do, not your friends or teachers. Friends and teachers want what's best for you but only you know how you feel and only you know what it is you really really want to do with your life.

2When you've decided what you want then you need to PLAN how to get it. Write down a step by step plan of how you are going to get it. Set one target a week that you need to hit on your way to your main goal.

3Then ORGANISE your time. Again, write down what you need to do and when you need to do it. You will of course have your school work to do and the things you need to do at home but if you really want to be a success you've got to be organised.

4You now need to be the LEADER. You need to be the leader in your life. You need to MAKE IT HAPPEN. It's no good waiting for someone to do it for you. You can achieve a good deal in your life but you must go to it. It won't come to you.

5And finally you need to CONTROL what you've done. This is to say when you've reached the goal you've set for yourself the previous week you need to write about how you did it. Write down how you achieved it and what you've learned. This will help you go into the next week with more understanding of how you do things. Not only that but you'll learn lots of new things along the way.

Good luck Joanne and let me know what you decide to do with your future.

Danny

And lastly I would like to thank Travellers Times and Danny Allum for giving me the opportunity to contribute to this publication, also the Traveller Education Service for their help.

Joanne Steele
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