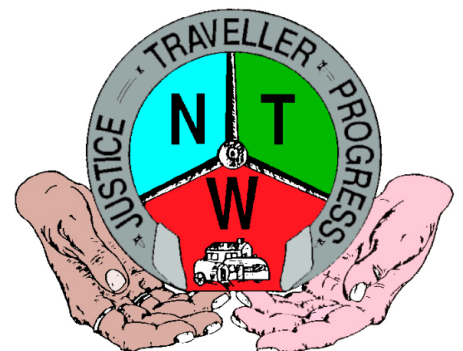


I AM A TRAVELLER

in Prison



st stephen's
green trust
TRAVELLER PRISON
LINKS PROJECT



Introduction

The Traveller Prison Links Programme 2014-2015 was carried out in Wheatfield Prison with the support of the Governors and staff and St Stephens' Green Trust.

Meath Travellers Workshops met Traveller inmates every week and through our discussions a commonly held view whether real or imagined was that "our voices aren't heard". This book of short stories is one way that their voices can be heard.

This booklet will also provide an interesting reading experience for Travellers and non-Travellers alike. It is hoped this will also provide a positive influence for the reader whether inside or outside the Prison.

Who wrote this book?

We worked with four groups of inmates between September 2014 and April 2015

Our groups were predominantly Travellers but included non-Travellers and Roma

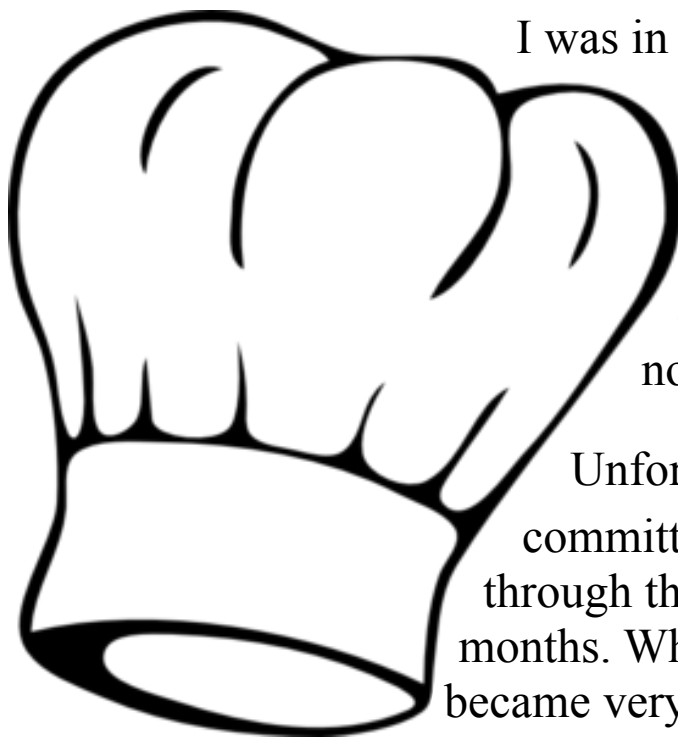
These wonderful stories were told by the following James, Eamon, Jordan, Andrew, Danny, Jonathan, Patrick, Stephen, Gary, Sean, Brian, Stephen, Gerry, Jonathan, Dave and Gerrard; and William RIP, who wrote a lovely poem during his time with us.

The MTW team was Michael McDonagh, Ellen McDonagh, Anne Hyland, and Sinead Burke. Patrick Rattigan provided administration support in the MTW office.

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Drink is the devil



I was in St Pats 3 years ago and I was stupid enough to not learn my lesson that drink is the devil. Since then I copped on and I got away from the wrong crowd. I got myself a job. I am now a qualified chef.

Unfortunately the crime I committed came to court two years later through the DDP and I ended up getting 9 months. When I ended up in adult prison I became very depressed. My first day I was brought to reception and searched and put in a

holding cell. They brought me to the landing that was to be my home for the next 9 months. I was in a cell on my own. In some ways being on your own is a good thing. It gives you time to think and plan the right decisions for the future. Being on your own was very lonely and didn't help with my depression. Luckily I avoided drugs inside this time. It was a help that I chose 23 hour lock up. This meant I didn't have to mix with the wrong crowd .

One day I heard someone say the name 'Xbox' the name of a friend of mine. I was delighted. I tried my best to come out and join him. I heard he was on a different landing so I went on hunger strike so I'd be moved into the same area. This I did for 63 hours. During this time I was put in a padded cell for my own safety. I ended up eating again, it's too hard. I'm not Bobby Sands.

Once I started back eating, I felt better. I was put back to my normal cell and started passing the time away by reading and writing letters. . They put me on medication. After a couple of days they told me to pack up and moved me to my friends landing.

I am happier here being with two of my friends and everyone else is sound. It has made a difference getting the support I need. . I know I am one of the lucky ones because I know when I get out I have a job to go to and a girlfriend waiting for me.



My old boss had seen I'd changed my ways before I was sentenced. I miss my family and my girlfriend. My advice would be take all the support you can get. Don't be listening to what people try to tell you to do. They are all Wally's.

The Chat from the Group....

What did you enjoy about the prison links programme?

- **The boat exercise—you had to fight your corner. We learned that it's hard to make the right and wise decision**
- **Writing my story made me think—I learned that I was not alone, I'm not the only person to feel this way**
- **It made me change my opinion on people**
- **It was nice to get company from the outside**
- **You knew people we knew, and it felt like you knew us**
- **It took my mind off things, you woke up in a bad mood but you could go into the group and take a break from everything**

My first day in prison

My first day in prison I didn't know what to expect, but my expectations were very low. I was never locked up before and would have only seen or heard of prison on documentaries.

My first day I was feeling very dead and emotionless inside and couldn't be bothered, because I was expecting prison for a good while. I knew had to face the punishment some time, so I just wanted to get it over with and move on.

When I come out onto my landing, my cell was 100 times better than I could of imagined. I knew one lad in here that I used to be good mates with, so it was alright, and I just had to make it a good experience not a negative one.

I have only a few weeks left and can assure myself I will never again get locked up again, because the bad thing about being locked up is being away from your family and anyone else you love.

**The Chat from
the group...**

"My Heroes"

My Mother

My Brother

My Father

**The lads from
"Fast
and Furious"**

Martin Cahill

Tupac

John Joe Nevin

**The nun who visits
us**

I miss my freedom

This is my first time in Prison, I have eight kids at home and I'm only in for driving while banned.

I was in court before Christmas and was put into Prison. I had heard stories of being cut up but I've not seen that at all. It's drugs that has the place in trouble, that's when I've heard these things happen.

I shared my cell with two others, that was grand, I had someone to talk to and we had a TV.

I then got moved and I'm now sharing with another Traveller man who's really quiet and is really good at art. It's good to be with another Traveller.

I miss my freedom and getting a bit of sun and being outside. If I was to give advice to someone else, never do anything wrong to end up in here, but if you do end up in here, make sure you keep your head down.

The Chat from the Group....

What makes you proud to be a Traveller?

Tinsmith tradition handed down from grandfather to father

Family loyalty

Proud of family

Good looking, loyal and respectful women

Self reliant

Very welcoming to country people, quicker than the other way round

Belonging to a group

Good dinners

Strong mothers

Tradition of song music and story telling

When I was 16 I took the wrong road

I was auld fashioned before my time. I wanted my ‘aulder’ brothers to be proud of me, and by doing so look good in my Fathers eyes. I wanted to show I could stand on me own two feet whenever I got into trouble; that I didn’t need my brothers to help me. So at the age of 16 I had my first bare-knuckle fight. I came out a winner and I knew I had made me brothers proud. I felt I was on top of the world!

I fought again and again, but that wasn’t enough anymore, and I wanted to move it up a step. I’d see my brothers and cousins when they were fighting sometimes using weap-



ons, so I wanted to be able to handle a weapon as well. So if my brothers were in trouble they could count on me to back them up. That’s when everything started to go wrong in my life, because I took it too far one day and that’s what lead me to prison.

I knew things had got out of hand, and if I didn’t stop soon I’d be doing life in prison someday, because it only takes one blow to kill a man. So one day my father sat me down and said to me “Son, you don’t need to do this to make me proud of you, I’m already proud of you.” But it was too late, the damage was done and now it was time to face facts— I was going to prison. That’s when I decided I had to change my life around. So I decided to get married at 19, because I knew I’d have a lovely wife waiting for me at home if I did get jail. So I got married and things were great. So I forgot about prison and the crime I caused. On the morning of court, I had in my back pocket the tickets to go to England. I was 60% thinking of going, instead of going to the courthouse.

When I was 16 I took the wrong road (continued)

2015

9

My wife was in a bad way and crying and I couldn't handle this hurting her. I was going to go until I spoke to my Father. He told me I was as well to face the music because one day I'd have to come back to Ireland for something serious and 'you could then be locked up'. He told me 'bless your face, hope for the best that things go right for you. So I explained to my wife what my Father said; I could tell she wasn't passing much heed. She didn't want me to go to jail, she just wanted to keep me with her at all costs. I kissed her and walked into the courtroom with her and my kid. I had to wait half an hour before the judge called me forward, it was the longest half hour of my life!

It didn't really hit me what was coming until a Guard came up to me and said, you're expecting 5 years here today. That's when I looked back at my wife and seen the tears in her eyes, I knew then I had fucked up my life. I walked into the court room and that's when the Judge took four years from my life for the crime I had caused. But that didn't get to me, what got to me was that I would be missing 4 years out of my wife and sons life. I tried to put on a brave face on for my wife, but truth be told when I got to prison and when they put me into a cell alone and banged out the door, I'm not ashamed to say I let a tear or two go. Because I love my wife and son very much, and I knew I wouldn't be there for them.

So I had snap out of the buzz I was in. I knew if I had any chance of getting out early to my wife and kid, I had to play the game. So I started to go to school to learn how to read. I knew this would be my only chance to learn how to read because I wouldn't do it on the outside I received a lot of certificates that I'm proud of, because I couldn't spell my name before I came to prison. So in one way I'm glad I got jail and in another way I was not. So now I'm ready to leave Jail and go back to my family a smarter man; that I can teach my son not to follow the same road I went down.

I wont be coming back

I was 16 years old when I was first arrested for 'buying'/ robbing a car. I was taken to the Garda station and was kept there for almost two days. I was charged and released. A few months later I attended court. The court was closed for the summer and when I went back to court I was 17 years old. By then I was married and had one child so I tried to get the court adjourned for as long as possible.



When I finally went to court I was sentenced to four months. Because of my age, I was sent to St Pat's. The journey was terrible. I was in the back of a Prison van with one other young fella.

The two of us arrived in St Pats and were held for one day. When I was seen by the Governor the next morning, he told me I was being sent to another Prison.

I wont be coming back (continued)

When I arrived, I was seen by a medic and was given my own cell. I was glad to see there was other Travellers on my landing, I'd never done jail before and I didn't know what to expect. I was really nervous, the best thing was seeing lads I knew.

That night in my own cell, I was thinking too much, I missed my wife and child very much. I have seven weeks done and I'm nearly finished. I know I won't be coming back to Prison again.

My advice to other young Travellers, is to think before you make any mistakes, because the consequences are bad, you don't know what it's like until you come here!

If you do get jail, you should keep your head down, mind your own business, don't get involved in others business, go to school and do any training you can get, it makes your time go much quicker.

I miss everything about the outside, my family, being able to walk around and drive your own car and having a life doing what you want. I believe that I have learnt from my mistakes and I hope I never have to come back to Prison again. I want to go home.



They can lock the locks, but they can't stop the clocks

This is my first time in prison. When I got sentenced in court I wasn't expecting it at all. When the judge told me I got ten months my hands wouldn't stop shaking. I got put in Pats for the first night which was a new experience but wasn't too bad because there was hardly any other prisoners and I didn't mix, they wouldn't let me.

I remember I got hardly any sleep. The thought of Prison was scary because didn't know what to expect. The next day I arrived at the prison. I can't remember what time, all I remember is going through big tall gates and them gates closing behind me. It was a horrible feeling knowing I wont be outside them gates for the next ten months.

I was brought into the reception were I was held in a holding cell for 2 hours. When the officers eventually came to book me in, I was made give finger prints, personal details and showed them my scars and tattoos. The one thing I was mortified about was having to strip in front of four officers. I was told to have a shower and get changed. I was lucky enough I got my own clothes dropped into me when I was in Pats for the night, so I didn't have to wear a prison tracksuit, like most new prisoners.

I was brought up to one of the landings and put in a committal cell for the night. When I walked onto the landing I felt intimidated by the shouts and the banging on the cell doors from the other prisoners. They were all shouting things like "what's your name? where you from? what age are you? do you know this person and that person. I just kept my mouth shut and said nothing since I knew I was being moved the following day.

Yet again I didn't get much sleep at all, I could hear all the others on the landing talking and immediately presumed they were talking about me. I was just praying I didn't have to mix with them the next day as they were all much older than me.

They can lock the locks, but they can't stop the clocks (continued)

I met the Governor the next morning and he decided what landing I was going to do my sentence on. I was relieved to find out I was going to be put with 18-21 year olds.

I was brought to my new landing. The other prisoners were out on the yard, so I was locked into my new cell which was my new home for the time I'm gonna spend here. I didn't know what to think.

I heard of so many things that happened in Prisons and for some reason I presumed that it was all gonna happen to me. I heard the door at the top of the landing open and I just thought "here we go, this is where it all begins!".

The other prisoners came straight up to my door and started flooding me with questions. I might not have showed it, but I was really intimidated.

The main thing they wanted to know was what I was in for and every question they asked, it was like they were trying to catch me out or something.

One of them slipped tobacco and skins under my door and just walked away. I immediately got paranoid, thinking "I don't even know this chap, and he's giving me tobacco".



They can lock the locks, but they can't stop the clocks (continued)

I'd heard stories of prisoners giving new prisoners stuff to get them on their good side and ended up making them do stuff they didn't want to do in return.

I sat in my cell, just staring at my wall, thinking of all sorts, like "how am I going to do this, what if this happens, what if that happens?"

When it came to 5.30pm I heard a clicking noise, it was the cell door opening, then it swung open and they all flooded in. The lads were asking me questions and trying to take the piss out of me. I didn't let them see I was intimidated, that's the worst thing you can do! And when they were giving me stick, I gave it back. It was all like a test to see if I was weak or not.

When they realised I wasn't a push over, they were more relaxed and by the time we were gonna be locked in for the night, we were all sitting around having a laugh and joking. They told me a bit about them and I told them a bit about me.

I remember that night just lying in bed feeling more comfortable with my surroundings. The fear was slowly drifting away. I cried that night but not because I was scared of prison, I had gotten over that fear. I

cried because I was stuck in here, I can't play with my child, I can't visit my friends or go out with them.



They can lock the locks, but they can't stop the clocks (continued)

Its sad because my child is so young and these early stages of her life is where she needs a father!

I remember feeling bad and low thinking of what my little girl must be thinking because I'm with her one day and the next day I'm gone. Thinking will she just forget about me? It was hard but I just kept reminding myself , "they can lock the locks but they can't stop the clocks".

If I was to give any advice to a new prisoner, it would be don't show weakness, because they will take advantage of it and keep yourself busy, go to work, shops, school or the gym. Don't hang around your landing, that's when you get involved with the wrong things, people and drugs. Keep yourself to yourself.

**Travellers
have their
own
History**

I'll never go back to prison

This is my second time in jail, my first time I was sentenced in St Pat's for 2 ½ months.

This time I am doing 10 months. I was arrested and held in a cold dirty cell overnight. I was brought to Court and sentenced to 10 months, I was not expecting any jail. I thought I would get off with a warning. I was shocked and surprised when I got jail.

I was sent to St Pat's for one night and spent the night alone. I thought very hard about where I was and I was very scared and nervous.

Next day I was sent to prison. I was brought in and asked all my personal details by the officer. I was stripped down in front of 3 officers and I was very ashamed. I was then handed a towel and told to take a shower. I was given jail clothes but I could keep my own runners.

Then I was sent to a landing. I was very paranoid because I didn't know anyone. My first night in the cell in Wheatfield was very frightening and I didn't get any sleep. I was scared and lonely.

Next day an officer came up to me and told me that he was putting me up to a landing. I told him my friend was in here, so he sent me down to my friends landing. I was very glad to be with someone I knew. I fitted in with the other lads, my time began very slowly but surely.



I'll never go back to prison (continued)

I really missed my family and friends at home but I couldn't tell anyone because I thought people would laugh at me.

My advice to other young fellows in jail would be make sure you stand up for yourself and don't be shy because the other boys will bully you.

Take whatever you are offered by the officers. Make sure you go to the school and do every bit of training you can get because it will make your time go faster.

I hope that I will never come back into prison . You think nothing of your freedom until it is taken from you.

Chat from the group....

What does Traveller Culture mean to you?

Trailers

Horses

Halting sites

Copper and scrap metal

Carpet

Large families

Feuds and fighting

Plenty of money

Competing with each other

Traditional music

Sulkys

Hi-ace vans

Wagans

Tents

Is this what you want for the rest of your life?

I was first locked up when I was 16 years of age. I was bought to court and the judge sent me for a week's remand to St Pat's.

The first time I walked into St Pat's I felt I was going to die! I didn't know anyone. They put me on a landing which was full of Dublin people. I was from down the country, so it didn't go down well. I was in a cell on my own. I was very frightened. I didn't want to eat, my head was wrecked but I slept ok.

Next morning I started to mix with the other lads. I spent the day walking up and down the landing, looking over my back because I didn't know what was going to happen. Most people that passed me were from Dublin and they didn't like us country lads, I really believed I was going to be cut up!

I began to settle in and I got in with some Travellers. They told me to keep away from the Dublin boys because they would start trouble.

I did my week on remand and when I went back to court, the judge gave me bail.

When I went back to court I was sentenced for 12 months in Prison. This time I wasn't so afraid because I had a lot on my mind. I was put on the committal landing. I was worried that I would not be able to make a phone call to my girlfriend.

The next morning I was put on my landing where I met other lads my age. The first week went ok, then I got bad news from one of my friends, and it upset me very much. The next two months of my sentence was very hard to do. I missed my family very much. By now I started to get over what was happening on the outside and I began to settle into doing my time.

Is this what you want for the rest of your life?

(continued)

The food is ok and I've started to get my act together and to go along to the school, go to the gym, and I now love cooking.

The worst part of being in jail is when you hear about things happening on the outside, and you hear people are saying shit about you. You don't feel in control and cannot do anything about it.

I would advise any young fella that comes into jail for the first time, to ask himself 'is this what you want for the rest of your life?' It is such a waste of life. When you're in here, keep your head down and plan what you want from your life and try and get lots of training. Try and stay away from bad company and jail.

Doing my time in Prison has made me realise that I want to have a good life on the outside. I am only 19 years old and I have a long life ahead of me. Jail has wisend me up and made me realise what type of people are your friends and who are not. I don't regret coming into jail this time because it is my Last Time. If I hadn't come into jail, I would probably be dead by now.

I get visits from my family and my family are very proud to see that I am doing well and staying healthy. For once, my family hears me speaking sense.



Is this what you want for the rest of your life?

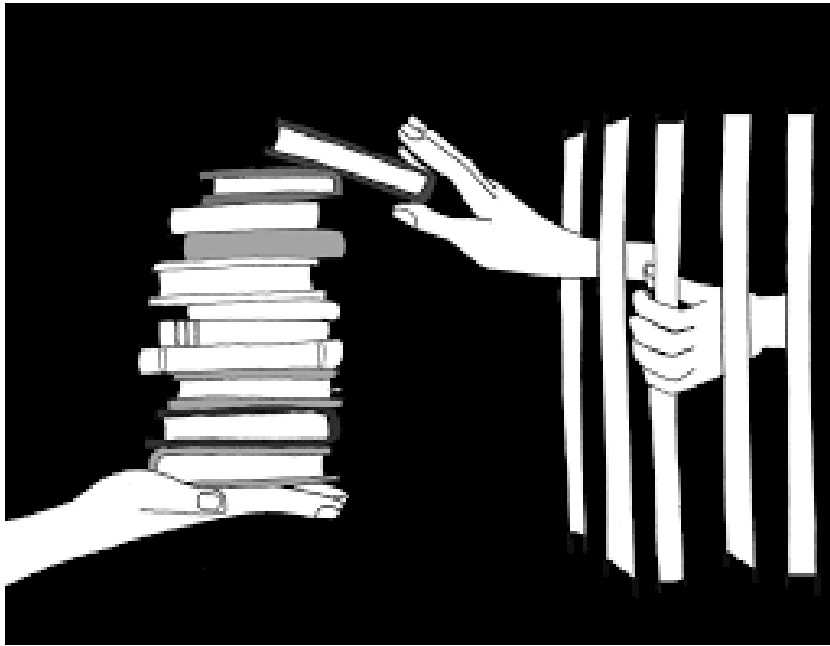
(continued)

For some people, sometimes jail is a safe place to be. It will either make you or break you. Jail is a lonely place to be, even though you have loads of people around you.

I want to go home. I miss the people that I love on the outside. It's very sad when you cannot talk to the people that you want to talk to and when you want to do simple things like go to the shop, you cannot go because you are locked up.

If I could offer advice to young men on the outside I would say 'Think of the consequence of your actions on you, your family and friends'.

**“Some Travellers
hide their
identity in court
and at the
Doctors”**



The chat from the group...

Why I didn't want to go to school in prison

Don't want to admit I have reading and writing
problems

Didn't like school when I was young

The teacher will make me feel stupid

What I felt when I did go to school in prison

It was different that I thought it would be

It was a lot less stress than I thought

You don't have to go, that makes a
difference

Your mother worries about you

I was brought from Navan and I didn't know how I was going to be sentenced but I knew I was going to get jail up or down. There was nothing I could do, when I got sentenced I just took it as it came. My mother was worried, she didn't know I was in court and didn't know I was in jail.

She ended up ringing the guards looking for me.

In the holding cell in Navan I was given a Supermacs meal- curry and a bottle of water. Then I went to Clover Hill. I was in the cell with 3 fellas I didn't know. The next day I went to St Pat's. I was sick of travelling at this stage.

I just wanted to settle down and do my sentence. In Wheatfield I was brought to my cell. I didn't know no-one at all. All the boys was asking me if I had any drugs. I told them I didn't touch them. Where are you from, what are you in for ? I would have rather if there was a few Travellers so I could have a proper conversation.

The first hour I was in, I got a report for fighting. The fella was trying to bully me and I stood up for myself. I threw him a few slaps and after that I didn't trust anyone of the others on the landing. Because when we were fighting they were all egging him on. I was scared of fighting, I just didn't want a scar on my face. After that, two friends of mine came in and the others started talking to me. I didn't want any more trouble and to do my time.

The first time my mother came in she said when you get out you've got to stop messing. My older brothers have been in prison so I knew what it was like. I thought it would have been worse, after a month or two you get used to it. It feels like home. When I get out I want to find a lovely wife and settle down. After a month or two you get to know the country fellas and you can chat to them.

Your mother worries about you (continued)

Advice to all these younger lads – stay in school and get an education. If you do things in prison the time flies by. School, yard, gym – just don't think about it.

There's nothing like your freedom. Jail is no place to be.

You miss out on a awful lot in life. When I do get out, I'm going to quiet down myself and go on holidays. Your mother is always worrying about you, feel sorry for her, she needs to bring you up money and clothes. They can lock the locks but they can't stop the clocks



It can be tough to share a cell

In court I thought I was going to get 2 years, so I was happy to hear I only got 15 months. My Dad was in the court and he handed me €50 for the shop, he said he'd be up to visit in a few weeks.

After sentencing I was put into a holding cell with another young lad. We were given a roll and a bottle of coke. I had to ask an officer to buy me smokes because I wasn't old enough to buy my own. He bought me tobacco and skins.

The other lad in the cells took a load of tablets out so we took a few 'blues', I took 5. After, we were put on the bus to St Pat's. We listened to a few tunes on the way. When we went through the gates, the other lad was taken off. They said I was too young for St Pat's. They had my date of birth down wrong, so we had to go to Bridewell to get the date put right and then I was bought back to St Pat's.

I was searched in Reception, showered and changed into Prison clothes. I was taken to my landing and I put my stuff into the cell. I then went straight out into the yard. I knew a few people in there so I wasn't scared or anything.

In the yard I got to see a few people I knew and got to catch up with them, I hadn't seen them for a while. They said they'd share their clothes with me because I was in the Prison clothes.

When we got called in I hadn't a clue where to go, so my mate took me in his cell and gave me clothes and I gave him some tobacco.

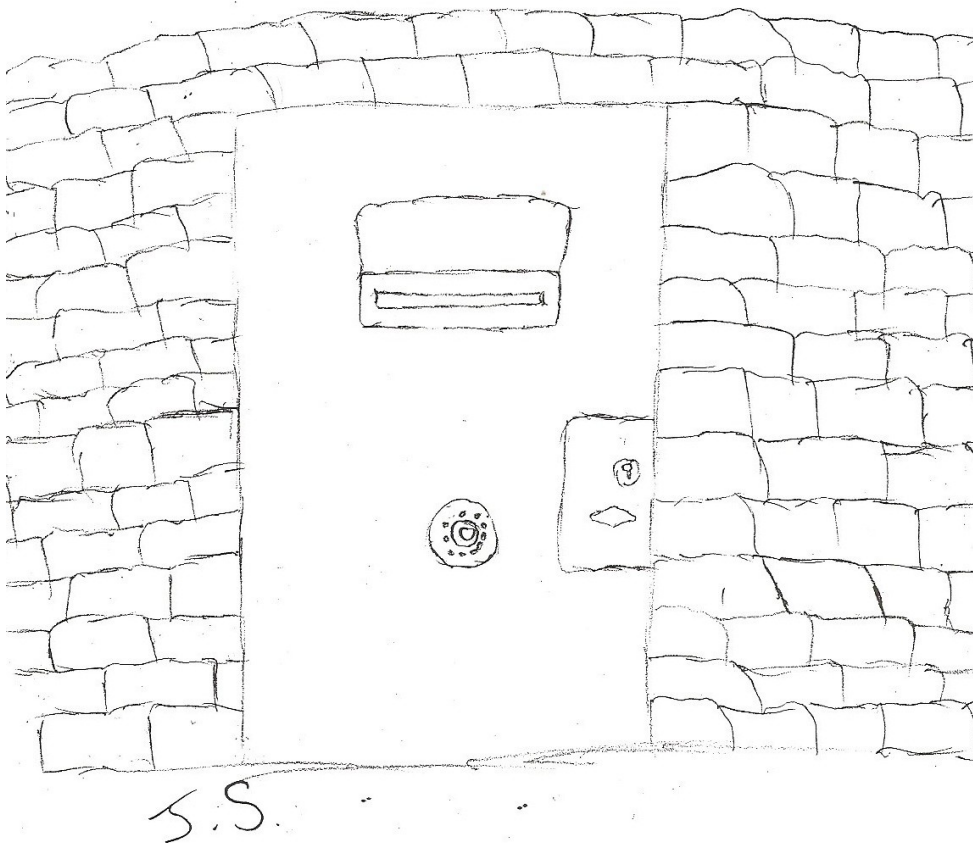
It can be tough to share a cell

(continued)

When I was trying to find my way back, I asked a young fella where's my landing? When I got there, the lad I'd been in court with was in the cell next door, so I got a few more tablets off him.

I was in a cell on my own and it was grand. I had a plasma screen and a remote control. I just chilled out and smoked a few roll ups. I don't remember falling asleep.

Another time though when I was on remand, I had to share a cell with three others. This was tough. They weren't people I'd normally mix with. They were 'scruffs', smoking gear and dirty. There was a load of tissue stuck on the wall. I got by because I had my phone and some smokes. Luckily a couple of days later I was moved into another cell with my two friends.



Walk Hard 'Skip'

We arrived in the courthouse and myself and my two friends (who were also my co-accused) were found guilty and sent on remand, where we were held for a month. The first few hours were the hardest; until one of our group produced a large number of Xanax tablets. We all took about 20 tablets each and they took about twenty minutes to work. After that, the next three days flew by, we didn't know where we were and what jail we were doing!

When the tablets wore off, that's when reality hit us, and we were under serious stress! One of us started smoking, and the other, who we'll call 'Skip', got himself sent to the medical unit with chest pains! He thought with his chest pains that the Prison system would take pity on

him and he would get a shorter sentence, but instead he was sent to a small dirty cell with a small blanket. The next morning he was sent



back up to us and he told us his plan hadn't worked.

When our barrister came to visit us, 'Skip' demanded to be bought home and promised he wouldn't run because he only lived an hour away, and he told the barrister 'You can pop around and check on me'. The barrister told him this was very unrealistic and he couldn't go home. After that we realised we'd have to do major time.

Walk Hard 'Skip' (continued)

We decided we would do a penance of only one meal a day for 10 days for our sentencing. But after 2 days, the older one of our group felt very faint and ill and said he couldn't go on, he wasn't going to make it!

After a month on remand, we headed to court to hear our sentence. The journey was very silent and nerve wrecking. We didn't talk. We acted like we didn't know each other; all praying silently.

When we received our sentence, we were in shock. 'Skip' kept asking everyone when was he going to be released? He was counting on his fingers to figure out what age his baby would be!

On our journey to Prison we were talking about what to expect. When we arrived we met the Governor, 'Skip' pretended to be our brother. He thought it would help him not to be bullied by the other Prisoners, thinking there was power in numbers.

I went up the landing first to get a cell sorted so the three of us could be together, and then went back to get the other two. Together we walked down the landing, it felt like we were walking through a gas chamber. 'Skip' was very afraid, so we kept saying 'walk hard 'Skip', walk hard' laughing at him, but really having nothing to laugh at! We were so traumatised!

We got to the cell and 'Skip' started looking for the bathroom, looking behind the doors. He was shocked to discover a bucket and a basin was to be his new bathroom; the look on his face was priceless!

So that was it, the three of us in a single cell, a bunk bed and a single pull out mattress, all squashed in. 'Skip', the oldest of us, refused to sleep or use the toilet for three days. He smoked at least 100 rollies and 20 fags a day!

Walk Hard 'Skip'

We worried about 'Skip', we kept telling him to 'Walk Hard'. He got very ill and shook looking, he aged in front of our eyes. He turned to cannabis to block out the reality of jail and also managed to get hold of some tablets. He had a great day and for a time forgot he was in jail. That night he tried to escape from the room, much to our amusement watching him.

The next morning, it was back to reality with a bang! We then decided to cop ourselves on and make the best of bad situation. We stopped taking the drugs, went to school and got work in different parts of the Prison. We focused on our appeal. With our change in attitude, getting involved in positive training programmes, we felt better and all got our time reduced.

Our advice to any young man facing jail is to not take any drugs, get a job to keep yourself occupied, and educate yourself while you're inside. Take advantage of your time in Prison to learn a trade.

Learn from your mistakes and remember it's not only you that takes the punishing, it's also your family that's affected as well.

Remember the 'screws' are only doing their job, a little bit of respect goes a long way and can make things a bit easier for you while you're inside; but this works both ways; and it's never worth it in the end.



Tough Life

I know sometimes the road gets tough
And sometimes life just ain't enough
When all your troubles come to bear
And Life begins to feel unfair

You want to give up and block it out
Stand up, scream, punch and shout
But in the end, only you can say
What becomes of this awful day

Do something that would make them proud
Stand up strong and say out loud
You won't give up, you will be strong
To get back, to where you belong

They are up above now, looking down
In your heart, and all around
To you their love they do shine down
To fix your heart, so Mam don't frown

So when sometimes the road gets tough
And life feels like it aint enough
Think of the people, Mam who loves you best
And God will look after the rest

By William Hourigan RIP



All I can do is hope

Some people when they come in to jail think that others will think that they're hard men. They don't realise that the community will look at them in a whole different way, they are a problem to the community.

Gardai see you as a target, the community see you as a problem. Your family can disown you, half of mine did.

When I was younger I wanted to be a mechanic. I was always into bikes and cars. When I came out of prison the second time I got a job working in a bike shop. I liked it there but when they found out I'd been in prison I was let go.

I felt I was being watched from the minute I got out of prison. The house I was staying in was searched. It felt like I couldn't walk down the street without being stopped and searched on the side of the road. It feels degrading.

When I get out I'll have to get out of Dublin. When you get released you're on your own. There is no support. The last time I was released I spent 8 months on the street until I went in again. When you're homeless or in prison you appreciate the small things. All I want is a place to stay when I get out. I want somewhere to live outside of Dublin, maybe Cork where I have relatives. I want to work on the fishing boats.

I don't get any visits when I'm inside. It doesn't bother me. The last sentence I did I was lucky to get an answer on the phone.

If I had a child in the future there is no way I would want them in prison. They will need to be afraid of me to stop them going inside. My youngest brother is 18 and I'm worried he's going the same way. I'm going to have to "bate" some sense into him when I get out.

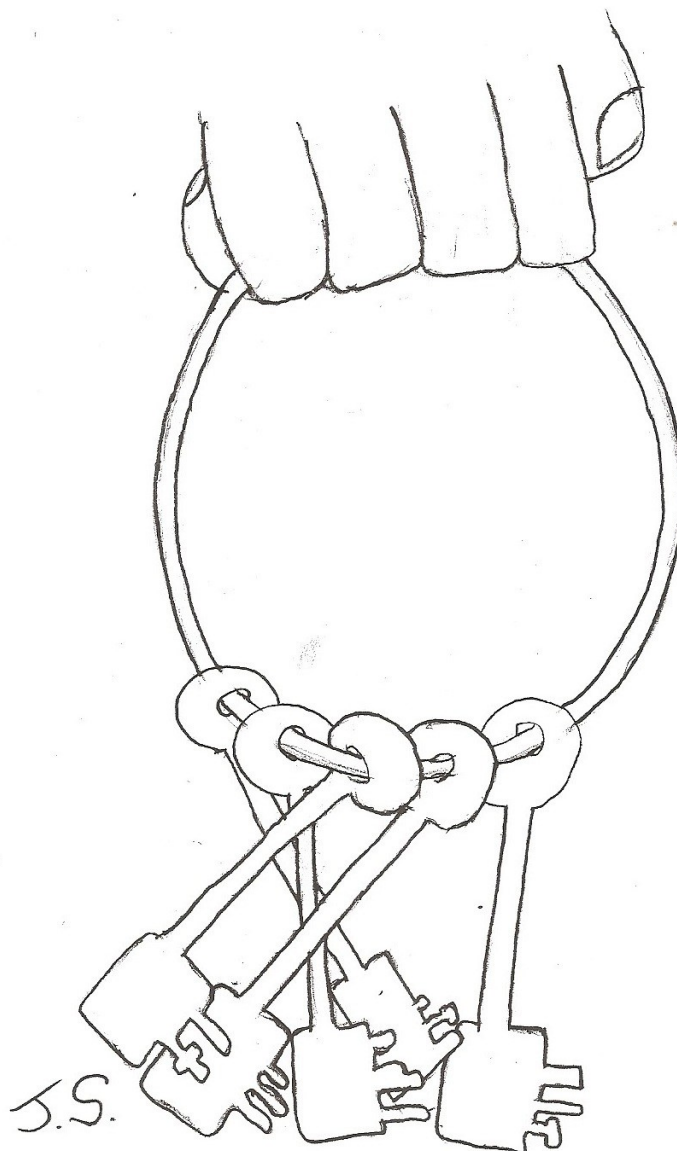
All I can do is hope (continued) part 2

I found out a couple of years ago that he was smoking weed. I sat him down with loads of grass from Amsterdam. He got so sick he hasn't smoked it since.

It doesn't get any easier, there are three things you never forget

1. How to act around officers
2. Your prison number
3. Your phone card number

When you leave prison you miss the routine and the cleanliness. It's not easy to make friends in prison. Prisoners think they're not judgemental, but they are. I've stayed friends with two other prisoners.



I'm not laughing now

I can remember sitting in court thinking everything would be alright and acting like I didn't care in front of my girlfriend and mates. It was all about the image and acting hard and not showing any fear for what was coming. I laughed and joked all day, sitting in the court house, but the smile wasn't long falling off my face when my turn came!

I sat there listening to the solicitors and judge talking but none of it really made sense. That was until it came to sentencing. I thought I'd get a slap on the wrist and hopefully a suspended sentence. When he said four years, I could feel my heart sink, then he said one year suspended and I felt a small bit better.

As I was being led away, I smiled at my family and friends to make it look like I didn't care and everything would be ok. Even in the cells I kept the act up and laughed and joked with the lads and kept a brave face. It wasn't till I was in the prison van that it all sank in, I just felt like breaking down.

Travelling to the prison felt like it took hours and it was the fear of the unknown, not the sentence that bothered me. I found it difficult to be searched and told to shower. I was handed a track suit and vest, jocks and socks. I was allowed to keep my own runners. I was then led to the committal landing for the first night. Lucky enough I was put sharing with a mate of mine from my area. We had a laugh and a few cups of tea.

The next day we were all split up and put on different landings where we had to start off at the bottom and work our way up. I was lucky and was given a job in the prison kitchen straight away. While I was working and busy everything seemed good, it was only when I was finished and alone in the cell with my thoughts that I felt alone. To be honest, no one is able for jail, the brain just can't adjust and all you can think of is going home.

The chat from the group...

What part of this course stood out for you?

It was nice meeting ye

I looked forward to it

**The bit of chat, you're mind is off prison when you're
in the group - it's stress free**

Making the book

**You mix with other Travellers and get to know who
else is a Traveller**

Jail isn't a nice place

My first time being sent to prison I was nervous I didn't know what to do or expect. I didn't know what state my cell would be. I didn't know anything about prison and I was sent to St Pat's.

I knew no one up there. I was missing my fiancée and my family, but what could I do? I couldn't tell the officer to drop me home. When we landed to St Pat's I got seen by the doctor and then got my bed kit. They showed me to my cell and locked the door; it was then it hit me how valuable your freedom is. I had to press a buzzer to get an officer to turn off the light.

I had a small TV and a "kittle" that was it. I didn't like it, but that's the stupid mistake I made and I learnt from my mistake; and when I get out I'm never coming back. Jail isn't a nice place.

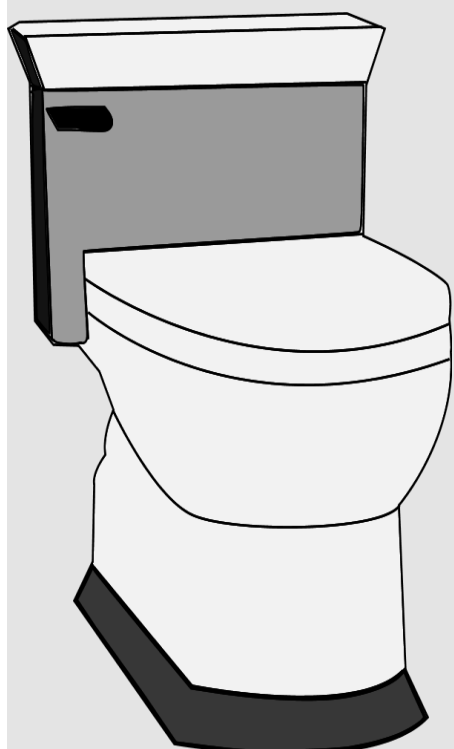
**Travellers are not
broken Country People**

You meet the strangest of people in Prison

The first time I was ever in prison I was 18. I went in and got bought to a landing where I'd be for six weeks. The place frightened the life out of me with mad skitzo's everywhere! There were people walking around talking to themselves with their fingers in their ears. Every now and then one would come up and roar into my face, things like that they were going to stab themselves and one man was washing himself with the water from the toilet. It felt like I had ended up on a landing amongst murderers and junkies.

On my first night I was woken up at 6am to find my first cell mate trying to choke himself with plastic bags shoved down his throat and also tied around his neck. I jumped up and was roaring at him and trying to pull the plastic off him. When the Officers came I shouted 'Get him outta my cell!'. He was taken away to the hospital. I heard he succeeded in killing himself a few weeks later.

The next day a new man was allocated to join me in my cell. He was obviously a junkie, and he had a load of yellow pusy bandages on his legs. He was crazy looking and kept trying to talk to me, it was all stutter and slurring. He got up to go to the toilet and just froze, swayed and then fell straight down, he hit himself off the toilet. I called for the Officers, he was having a seizure and was also taken off to hospital.



What kind of place is this? I asked myself and I hoped I'd be left on my own or at least get someone normal so I'd have someone to talk to. I was happy to meet my next cell mate, he seemed ok at first, but then I noticed he was kind of sly. He didn't talk much about why he was in, so when he was asleep I nicked his book of evidence, it turned out he had strangled someone. There's me an ordinary decent criminal and who are they locking me up with? Luckily the next day I was moved out to another cell.

³⁵Take it on the Chin

I can't forget the day the judge said 2 years. My heart sank. I felt empty and it was the end of the world. I only just turned 16. It was gonna be my first time in St Patrick's Institution as the lad's call, St Pat's. I was so paranoid because all of the stories I heard about the place, I had heard of people getting stabbed and sliced. It sounded like there was always trouble.

Well an hour after I got my two years, I was brought straight to the Garda Station. I was searched and put in the holding cells. That's when reality kicked in. I knew my mother was going to be heart-broken. Twenty minutes later I was allowed a visit from my father and mother who came to the Garda station. I could see in my mother's eyes that she was very upset. I felt ashamed and I felt like I had let my whole family down. I was more worried about my mother that I forgot I was going to St Pat's. 6 o'clock came and the Garda called me and this was it, on my way for St Pat's. Cuffs on and put in the back of the van. People would say it was the longest drive ever, but I didn't want the van to stop. I didn't want to go to this place. I didn't know what to expect.

So we were at Pat's. I will never forget it. The big long lane first with two big blue gates. "This is it" I said to my self, "I'm ready". So it was straight to reception. Property taken off me. I was shocked by the way the officer said "Right, strip". I honestly thought he was messing, but no, he was serious. It was horrible to strip in front of these two men I've never met in my life. I was given prison clothes, they were thrown at me; and I was put in my cell for the first night. It was a long night. Morning came. "This was it" I said to myself, "Take it on the chin".

My first day was hard. My first day I was fighting with a fella over a stupid jacket. I hated St. Pat's, it's no place for anyone. I said to myself "I will never be back".

I have time left to do and it's not easy for anyone, but I'm strong. I'll hang in there!

Don't come to prison, it's not a life for anyone!

The Prison Links Programme and this booklet would not have been made possible without the help and support of the following people:

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Sr Joan and the Probation Service

And last but not least...The tea makers!